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Adventure
TALBOT MUNDY · COMMANDER ELLSBERG · J. D. NEWSOM
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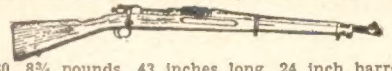

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By the Man who Wrote

THE "King's Regulations" are less elastic than a bronze tablet; there is the devil to pay for the least infraction of them. So when Sergeant Sam Trelawny killed in cold blood, with the butt end of a rifle, Captain Eustace Laidlaw, and they locked him in the regimental cells, he was provided within the hour with a postage stamp, pen, ink, envelop and paper. He had the right to summon an attorney or his next friend. No one doubted why he had killed Laidlaw, although no one saw him do it. Laidlaw was the kind of officer whose insolences always lead to something ugly in the long run. He had a fixed idea that success depends on self-assertion and on snubbing one's inferiors. No one was sorry for Laidlaw.

On the other hand, the regiment was shocked on Trelawny's account. He was much the most popular sergeant—perhaps a shade too popular. He could box, and he was captain of the cricket

"King of the Khyber Rifles"

TALBOT MUNDY

CHULLUNDER GHOSE THE GUILELESS

team as well as football center forward.

He never nagged, but he had the trick of teaching duffers how to shoot straight and to keep out of trouble. He was known as a patient man, a good sport and a reasonably tactful blinker at offenses if offenders also used tact. But there was always a light in his blue eyes that suggested a terrific temper if one vexed him hard enough. They were the eyes of a killer, and he had rather high cheekbones under them. There was pride on his lips, beneath the neat mustache—a kind of gambler's pride, that equally delights in self-control and in daring life to spring surprises.

All the officers, of course, were forced by their position to show indignation; but the men were almost openly in sympathy with the sergeant and there was talk, the very first day, of a subscription fund for his defense, and of the names of suitable attorneys. It was agreed on all sides that Trelawny's only possible chance to escape hanging was to be committed as insane.

They began really to believe him insane when it was learned, from the orderly who mailed the prisoner's uncensored letter, that the "next friend" to whom he had written was not an attorney at all, but Chullunder Ghose, an obese Bengali *babu,* who notoriously made his living doing odd jobs for the secret service, and by means of any other subtleties that agreed with his curious disposition. Chullunder Ghose was rumored to have been in Tibet two or three times; he was known to be familiar with all the byways of the mountains that guard India's northern frontier; and nobody pretended he was not a master of evasion and peculiar resource. But he was not, in the opinion of the rank and file, the sort of person to depend on in this case.

He arrived on his bicycle—so huge it was a wonder the machine could bear his weight. He leaned the bicycle against the wall of the orderly room, in flagrant defiance of regulations, produced his letter, was searched for contraband and presently waddled away toward the cells that looked out on the barrack yard with their backs to the mountains. There, in full view through the cell bars, but out of earshot of the sentry, he sat on a four legged stool and faced Trelawny, who sat on the cot with his chin in his hands. They were opposites—as opposite as two men can be, racially, in temperament, habit, appearance and attitude toward life.

"Did you kill him?" asked the *babu,* with his head to one side. It was an enormous head, wrapped in a purple turban that was out of harmony with his English tweed shooting jacket and white Hindu loin cloth.

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because," said Trelawny, "he had

baited me and sneered at me until he wore away the screen o' convention between us. He never could rest until he'd seen my thoughts raw-naked and they weren't good even for myself to see. He peeked and he pecked till something popped out through a hole in my hide; and, next I knew, he lay there with his head stove in, and my gun butt bloody."

"Why me? Self am penurious person uncontaminated by a legal viewpoint," said the *babu*. "Furthermore, am said to be a reprehensible and dissolutely minded dealer in opprobrium. So, should I even sit beside you at your trial, judge and jury would—"

TRELAWNY'S voice sounded hollow, as if it came from the cavernous depths of his being.

"There's going to be no trial," he said.

"Unless they find you mad before your trial," said the *babu*. But again Trelawny interrupted:

"I'm as sane as you are. I'd never have killed him if he hadn't blown his nose contemptuous and promised to have me reduced to the ranks for being impudent."

"No witnesses to what he said?" the *babu* asked him.

"No. None. It's a case of hanging."

"You should engage an attorney, sahib."

"Hanging is no way to die," Trelawny answered. "You remember when I saved you from a Hillman's *tulwar*, that time when you may—or may not have been selling ammunition to 'em? I never asked no questions."

"Sahib, I was engaged on a little espionage on that occasion."

"Did I save your neck?"

"Yes."

"Save mine."

"Sahib, this *babu* is ninety-nine decimal ninety-eight per cent pure opportunist, and the other two hundredths per cent consist of disrespect for justice as the world delivers it to persons such as you and me. But how shall I save your neck unless I bribe the hangman to provide a rotten rope?"

"Help me out o' here. I need a hacksaw."

"That is simple."

"And maybe a short crowbar."

"Can be managed."

"I shall also need disturbance o' some sort to draw away attention when I'm ready to get through that window. I've no watch. I'll have to figure midnight as the moment when the moonlight hits that drain in the cell door. That's when I'll make my getaway—the next night after you deliver me the hacksaw."

"But where will you go? Be thoughtful. Who will hide you in Peshawar?"

"You will."

The *babu* smiled.

"Am convinced that self-amusement is divinest human faculty, and all that. Thought of entertaining you is exquisite. But he who laughs last is the one who gets away with something. *Verb. sap.* They would find you. They would hang you. They would give me ten years in the prison. I should not smile."

"All I ask is half a chance."

"To do what, sahib?"

"Die some other way than hanging. Dammit, I've lived clean, Chullunder Ghose. I've done right in the line o' duty, and there's many a recruit has learned from me to take his physic standing up. But I've killed an officer, and that's the end o' me. I'm asking you, as one man to another, to give me a chance to die respectable. Hanging's no death for a man. There's dirty sneaking murderers who kill for money—"

"Truly, sahib. Only last night three soldiers and two policemen were stabbed in the back for their rifles and boots; and when you sent for me I had already offered to detect the culprits. There will be a big reward. I think I know who did it."

"Let 'em hang that kind if they can catch 'em," said Trelawny. "Did or did I not risk getting killed to save your

fat old neck, Chullunder Ghose?"

"This *babu's* blood runs cold again to think of it."

"Then are you going to help me?"

"How? Am pauper without influence. Am coward, totally devoid of bloody mindedness. Am mountain of obesity, whom any one could see if I should play at hide-and-seek. Am—"

"Listen. You're the downiest, artfulest dodger I've met in a lifetime," said Trelawny. "What's more, you're a brave man, even if you do get the wind up your spine. And you're on the level, even though you are the damnedest liar in the universe. You never in your whole life let a friend down. I'm your friend; I've proved it. Now what?"

"Shall I go to prison for you? Oh, well—"

"No. Keep out o' prison. Use that great fat head o' yours that's as full o' bright brains as a nest is o' hornets. Think me up a chance to die a white man's death and, if I've no time to say thank you, I'll die knowing I made anyhow one friend in a lifetime. Will you do it?"

"Sahib, it is contrary to my religion. It is conspiracy, which is against the law. It is unwise, probably impossible and very risky, to say the least. It is ridiculous, and it is also incredible. Besides, I have other important business."

"So you won't?"

"Yes, I will—and for those reasons. Business and pleasure, sahib, sentiment included. You must have a *wakil*—an attorney."

"What for?"

"To allay suspicion. I will send you an attorney. Tell him nothing."

"Right-o. Will you shake hands?"

II

CHULLUNDER GHOSE, who almost never told the plain truth except to those who understand it (and who are they?) lied in declaring he had no influence. He had a lot of it, as any one must have to whom a steady job is absolute anathema but affluence is heaven. It was backstairs influence; and it was based on intuition, incredulity, observant wits, and knowledge.

"Justice cheated of a victim must have substitutes, or it will substitute this *babu*. As a martyr I am not good sport," he muttered.

He easily obtained a hacksaw with a spare blade from a blacksmith in Peshawar bazaar; and the same man made him a small crowbar that could be slipped up a sleeve or down a pants' leg. Also, very easily, he bribed the brother of the sweeper whose duty it was to clean the cell in which Trelawny was confined. The brother agreed to give the implements to the sweeper, who was to hide them under the mattress in the cell while Trelawny was having his exercise out in the yard. There was almost no risk of failure in that part of the plot.

"You are to tell that sweeper person," said the *babu*, "that unless he succeeds, he shall himself be whipped and sent to prison; because I will tell to a magistrate all I know about him."

There was also sweet simplicity about the next step, although it was based on intricate familiarity with men and habits that are not more simple than the differential calculus. He knew Peshawar—understood it. So he visited a man from Kandahar—a bitter faced Moslem with a boil on his nose, who was lodged among the horse and camel traders at the back of the crowded bazaar, and who camouflaged cupidity by looking as if no sympathy, and nothing but the stings of bad luck, ever entered his experience. Ali Ahmed sat cross legged on a pile of sacks beneath the tin roof of a ramble-shack veranda, very displeased by an Afghan's comments on the dissolute condition of his nose. It was plain he expected mortifying humor from the *babu*, and his lip curled in anticipation.

"One of these days," he remarked by way of greeting, "that cheap bicycle will buckle beneath your weight. That will be funny. I hope I may live to see it. Why did you say you would be here two

hours sooner? You have kept me waiting."

The *babu* leaned the bicycle against the side of the veranda.

"I was interrupted, sahib."

He sat down on another pile of sacking, perfectly aware that the man from Kandahar suspected him. A reputation for doing odd jobs for the secret service soon spreads. It needs guile to overcome that.

"How is business?"

"Allah! Business? There is none."

"I suppose not," said the *babu*. "I should dread to be in business—with all these murders going on." He looked straight in front of him, avoiding Ali Ahmed's eyes, and then suddenly changed the subject. "But I have heard you have bought a dozen camels."

Relief from sudden strain betrayed itself in the change of Ali Ahmed's tone of voice. Apparently he was not pleased to speak of murder. Business was less embarrassing.

"Nine-and-twenty vicious brutes that eat their heads off—and no market for them," he answered.

"Why not sell them to the government?"

The man with the boil on his nose made a noise such as camels do when irritated, only his noise was sharpened a bit by sarcasm.

"There are no brains in all that fat carcass of yours. I bought them from the government."

Chullunder Ghose suppressed the obvious retort. He wished not to appear to have too many brains. His eyes managed not to reveal a glimpse of the humor that lurked within him—based on triumph.

"I am sorry for you," he said in the courteous tone that stirs no animosity. "I think it is a scandal that the government should sell unmanageable camels to an unsuspicious dealer. Who would buy such brutes if he knew they were vicious?"

All those camels had been bought at auction "as is", after being advertised as "unsuitable for government use." Chullunder Ghose was perfectly aware of that. He knew they were intended to be resold, someday, somewhere, as perfect specimens.

"I was very badly cheated," said Ali Ahmed. "It is not a wonder that the people are rebellious against this government, which deals so scurvily with honest men."

CHULLUNDER GHOSE exuded sympathy.

"And furthermore," he remarked, "the courts are useless in such circumstances. Self can think of scores of instances where suits against the government have ended only in humiliation and the court costs mulcted from the plaintiff."

"Too true," said the other. "We are cheated on every side. One can not even gamble without being cheated."

Chullunder Ghose pricked up his ears at that last remark and made a mental note of something. Any one who knew him intimately might have guessed now by the smile in his mild brown eyes that he had stumbled on a hot scent. Murder and gambling are usually closely associated in Peshawar.

"Therefore, there is nothing for it but to use such wits as God provided," he remarked. "It is a mystery to me that Ismail—at whose house I also sometimes gamble and get cheated—was not long ago knifed in the liver."

"Inshallah, that might happen to him yet," said Ali Ahmed.

"But, let us hope, not yet," Chullunder Ghose suggested, catching the thought behind the words. They were pious words. They were calmly spoken.

But the *babu* knew he had guessed rightly that the reason why a knife had not yet found its target in the lungs of Ismail the gambler was that Ali Ahmed needed him. Why did he need him? Once more he switched the subject.

"Some Pathans have started again stealing rifles. Did you hear that two policemen and three soldiers were slain

—by Pathans—last night, for their weapons and boots?"

"I heard it." He paused and Chullunder Ghose noticed the pause. "But who knows that was done by Pathans?"

"True, who knows? I have heard that orders have been given to the troops to shoot at the first provocation, after sunset. I am thinking, if those camels should be caused to stampede through a barracks in the darkness, they would certainly be fired on. If it could be shown —by the mouths of reliable witnesses —that some one in a uniform was seen to cause the camels to stampede by making terrifying noises, then the government would have to reimburse the owner of said camels. Not too many people in the secret. And no money for the witnesses until after the case is won and compensation ordered by the court."

"You are a genius," said Ali Ahmed. "I desire to leave Peshawar, but I do not wish to take those camels with me. I would rather buy other, more suitable camels. But what do you expect to get from this?"

"Your honor's good will. Who knows how soon he may need a friend?"

Ali Ahmed covered the boil on his nose with his hand, perhaps to soothe the inflammation. Or, it may have been he did not wish to let his smile be noticed. It was a mean smile.

"I am a true friend when it pleases me," he answered.

"And it happens," said Chullunder Ghose, "that I know this: Tomorrow night, at midnight, there will be a murderer confined in the cells at the back of the barracks in which the Queen's Own Loyal 88th Light Infantry are quartered. Do you know them? They will be particularly nervous, since there is a rumor of conspiracy to rescue the prisoner. There will be a double guard undoubtedly. And should an avalanche of camels suddenly descend upon them they will very likely turn out a machine gun. Have you ever seen a camel shot by a machine gun? It converts a camel into something that not even expert witnesses could asseverate has any value."

"It is worth thought," said Ali Ahmed. "It might be managed."

"Think swiftly then. Tomorrow is the only night that is suitable. I can see to it that half a dozen soldiers shall be treated by a friend of mine to more beer than is good for them. They shall be sent home close to midnight in time to escape arrest for absence without leave. Any one can say, without incriminating them, that their hilarity was what alarmed your vicious brutes and made them stampede."

"Are you sure you can do that?"

"Yes. And let me tell you that the way to bring those camels silently is to follow the road that leads around the barracks, because that is a lonely road at night; moreover, it is inches deep in dust, so that the camels' footfall will be unheard. Turn them back when they are past the barracks, and then stampede them through the gate that is kept open for officers' motorcars. It is simple. It is easy. But select your witnesses and be on time—at midnight to the minute."

He with the boil on his nose demurred a moment and his normal distrust stole into his eyes, that had been flinty with the hope of profit. Nobody would know the camels were the same ones that the government had sold him; he could demand a high price for the dead ones; it would hardly matter if a few survived the midnight butchery. But what about the *babu?*

"Later, you will come to me," he said, "and threaten to tell tales unless I pay you handsomely."

"If I should do that," said the *babu,* "I should certainly expect to get a long knife in the belly. This *babu* has several ambitions. None of them includes a funeral for having danced on dynamite or for having made threats to one who has as many scoundrels in his pay as you have."

"True. It would be dangerous," the other answered. "Nevertheless, you do expect to make a profit for yourself. What is it?"

"Profit?" said the *babu.* "Why, yes, I must live; am sole support of wife and offspring. I expect to introduce to you a pleader who will take your case before the courts; and he will pay me for the introduction."

"How much?"

"Twenty per cent of his fee," said the *babu,* guessing wildly.

"You must split that with me."

"I expect to. Why not? Business is business. Then you will be there with the camels?"

"Yes. At midnight."

III

CHULLUNDER GHOSE called next on Kangra Khan, a *wakil* with gold rimmed spectacles and a nose which suggested that other men's troubles are sometimes entertaining as well as profitable.

"Who will pay me?" he demanded.

"I am curious to know that also," said the *babu,* "but I think the other sergeants may raise a subscription, and perhaps all the men will contribute. Go and see Trelawny and then get your money in advance. Did you ever know me to bring you a bad case?"

"Yes," said the attorney, "very bad ones. But they are sometimes funny."

"Self am of opinion that being hanged is neither good nor funny," said Chullunder Ghose. "Am full of mockery of what is known as justice. I will come and see you after you have seen your client."

Then he pedaled his bicycle through the dust, in the teeth of a wind that made his fluttering loincloth look like linen on the line. But he was not too occupied with the exertion to observe a couple of policemen pasting notices on walls, announcing in two languages a big reward for the assassins dead or alive who had slain two constables and three British infantrymen.

At last he reached the outskirts of the city and turned down a narrow alley between walls of mud and corrugated iron. He was seen approaching. Evidently he was known there, if not expected. A door in a wall swung open and he wheeled in, dismounting in a smelly yard where chickens picked amid the refuse of untidy generations. A disreputable looking Hillman shut the door and locked it.

"Ismail, why this thusness?" asked the *babu.* "Whom have you killed? Why do you look like a dead bellyache that some one slew with paregoric? What are you afraid of?"

"I fear only Allah," the man answered. "But His peace resides in wisdom. Therefore, there will be no gambling here this afternoon."

"Who spoke of gambling?"

"Why else should you visit me?" the owner of the place demanded.

Impudence was too much for his spirit to attempt just then, but he could be surly. His long earlocks, oily black and curling upward, hung like inverted question marks. His yellow teeth showed in a crooked slit that might be either smile or sneer. His eyes were sulky—almost smoky—with suppressed anticipation—of what? The *babu* shrewdly diagnosed it.

"Big game last night? Who got cheated? Who has threatened to inform against you?"

"*Babu-ji,* as God is my witness, nobody but I was cheated."

"Your God is a long way off and you can lie to him safely until you are dead," said the *babu.* "But to lie to me is different. I take more notice of it than your God does. Do you think I fill this belly by keeping the secrets of fools who reward my discretion with lies in reply to a civil inquiry? Do you think I want to know for curiosity? And do you think I care that somebody gets cheated? How, though, shall I mystify the constables and save you from a fine, and perhaps imprisonment, unless I know the circumstances?"

"Sahib, who has talked against me?"

Chullunder Ghose, as confidently as the pious pray, and as the builders build on bedrock, summoned the gods of

probability to guide him. He had not much else to go on than his intuition and his knowledge of the customs of Peshawar. But he hesitated no more than a man in ambush dares to who takes a pot shot at a sound in darkness.

"He who bought the nine-and-twenty camels from the Sirkar—he whose nose is like a red hot rat that gnaws him—he who—"

"Ali Ahmed? *That* Kandahari dog? *That* unbelieving mongrel whelp of a shameless mother? Sahib, you astonish me!"

"Then why not look astonished, instead of scared out of your wits?"

"What did he say, *bahadur?*"

"Now I *know* you lie to me! How often does a Hillman call a Hindu by a title of respect unless he intends to deceive the Hindu?"

"But what did he say, sahib?"

"It is on what *you* say to me that destiny depends. It is a simple little matter to silence Ali Ahmed if I know the truth about him."

"Not so, sahib. He has many scoundrels in his service, bold ones—as indeed he must have who proposes to sell rifles to the Hillmen on his way home. Ali Ahmed needs to say but '*Basta!*' and his enemy lies dead before tomorrow's sunrise."

"How do you know?"

The Hillman avoided the question, blurting scraps of truth to cover other truth he wished to hide, and adding flattery to make the truth he did tell seem untruthful.

"Sahib, it was not I, it was he who cheated. Ali Ahmed always cheats, but who dares to accuse a man whose servants murder at his bidding? As an honorable *babu,* to whom treachery is impossible, you are trusted by all and sundry. Nobody is fool enough to doubt your honor. But your honor knows that there are other men of unspeakable character, whose treacheries enable them to plunder people like ourselves."

"He does a rifle business, does he?"

"Sahib!"

"How do you know he does a rifle business?"

"By the beard of the blessed Ali, I know nothing."

"Yes you do. You know this: If I choose to, I can tell the name of who slew Mahommed Tirah, whom the constables found in the street three months ago."

"That was a fair fight, sahib. He had sought to make my young wife run away with him."

CHULLUNDER GHOSE, who had not known who slew Mahommed Tirah, but who knew now, restrained himself.

"I was seen to come here," he remarked. "I am expected elsewhere. I should be looked for if I did not turn up."

"Allah! It is wisdom to trust a tiger rather than a *babu!*"

"Then let me tell you, Ismail, there is a difference between men and tigers. It is a big difference. For if you let a tiger escape from a trap, he will turn and devour you. But a man who is spared by one who might, if he chose, betray him to the prison and the hangman—if he is at all a wise man—offers proof of gratitude. Am personally of opinion that gratitude is trash unless gratitudee can use same. What do you say?"

"Sahib, I have hardly any money. I have told you. I was badly cheated by that Kandahari scoundrel, Ali Ahmed."

"How do you know he does a rifle business?"

Terror struck Ismail.

"No, no, sahib. To betray him is too dangerous. Allah! I would love to slap him on the sore snout and to enjoy his smarting before seeing him dragged through the streets by Sikh policemen. Dearly I would love it. But I dare not. He is valuable to his rogues. They would avenge him. Allah! It is not amusing to be tortured in the way they do it."

"True," said Chullunder Ghose. His own bulk shuddered at the mere thought. "Should Ali Ahmed learn that you have talked about his cheating, and about his

business in rifles, how long would it be before those men of his descended on you? Yours is not a comfortable prospect. That is to say, unless you take me into confidence. I am an expert confidee, to whom it is safer to tell secrets than to leave me to discover them. And how about a thousand rupees?"

"Allah! Whose?"

"Mine, Ismail. You shall have a thousand rupees on the day when Ali Ahmed hangs."

"You will dare to do that?"

"Where do they hide the stolen rifles?"

"Allah! Nay. I know not."

"If you do not know, then why so afraid of Ali Ahmed? You know where the rifles are hidden. You tremble whenever you think of what might happen to you if you told the secret. You had better tell me."

"Sahib, I do not dare to tell you."

"So you do know. Very well then, I shall have to use my own wits and omit you from the list of fools whom it amuses me to spare. Open that door. I am going."

"Nay, nay. Stay and talk this over, sahib."

In Ismail's eyes there lurked the wish to plunge his knife into the *babu*. And again, his hesitating hand was even more suggestive than his eyes. But the *babu* had a whistle. It was a police whistle. He was playing with it. And besides, enormous though he was, and timid though he might be in the face of steel, he had a reputation for astonishing skill in self-defense. What looked like fat was the same sort of bulk that Japanese wrestlers cultivate.

"Either open that door, or else open your thought," said the *babu*.

He was watching Ismail's chest—the telltale movement of the loose, untidy shirt that would reveal what the man's eyes might deliberately mask. The sinews underneath the shirt relaxed. That danger vanished. Instantly the *babu* took advantage of the vacuum it left behind it. He sprang like something shot forth from a crater. Weight, strength, suddenness, determination, skill—all concentrated on the one objective—struck. There was a fluttering cackle and scream of frightened chickens as Ismail fell, writhed, tried to struggle against a grip like a gorilla's; then he lay breathless, staring upward at the bulge of the *babu's* belly and at the blade of his own knife, stolen from him by a hand that looked able to use it. The chickens resumed their rather hopeless scratching in the compound dirt.

"You attacked me," said the *babu*. "I am wondering why you did that. If I were vindictive I could kick you in the liver. I could slit your gullet with your own knife. I could cut out that useless tongue that fears to talk to me."

"Let me up. I will tell," said Ismail.

But the *babu* accurately gaged the value of a Hillman's promise.

"Tell first," he retorted. "Self am also opportunist, to whom bird-in-handishness is better than a meal next week. Make it snappy."

Ismail surrendered.

"Allah! I will not tell. But let me show you."

"Thought so. Get up. Is this your knife? Take it. Now attempt to kill me with it. Come on. Are you timid? Lesson will cost you nothing except pain and humiliation; they will charge you nothing at the mission hospital—all free, including use of hymn book and admonishment. You are afraid to stab me? Or, you are ashamed to do it? Or, you think it unwise? You know nothing about wisdom, let me tell you. Nothing. Absolutely nothing. Had you any, you would kill me. Because otherwise you will have to obey me. And obedience is pleasant only to the obeyee. You dare not kill a chicken. No, you dare not. Liar, am I? Let me see you kill one."

ISMAIL caught a chicken, trotting after it in circles until the bird grew too bewildered to escape. He killed it by the Moslem *halal* process, which is sanguinary, if effective. Chullunder Ghose

seized the dead bird, swung it and splashed Ismail with the blood; he made a merciless mess of his shirt and trousers.

"Now you look like what you are: a murderer, a brawler, a disturber of peace. If a policeman saw you there is blood on you, blood on your knife, fresh blood—whose? Who knows? But he would take you to the *kana* for investigation. And how long would it be before Ali Ahmed heard of that? And when it had been proved—tomorrow, maybe—that it is only chicken's blood, and you have been released—then what? How much of your story will Ali Ahmed's men believe? Not one word of it, except that that the police have locked you in a cell.

"They will say you have told the police their—his—Ali Ahmed's secrets. They will cut your toes off, one joint at a time; then your fingers and thumbs; then your ears; then your nose. They will tear your tongue out. They will put out your eyes with the points of their knives. Nor is that all. And what is left of you they will throw down your well and befoul it forever. You desire that? Very well then. Take that smock off the line. It is not yours? What do I care. Take it down and put it on. Then lead the way to where those stolen rifles are. And if you try to play a trick on me, I will immediately summon a policeman to whom I will denounce you as a man who has blood concealed under his smock. I will ride my machine. Lead the way."

No less bewildered than the chicken had been, Ismail led the way, through the door and down the alley, to an old barn in an abandoned compound. There was a litter of dismantled, almost prehistoric motor cars, some useless lumber and a ton or two of trash in damaged barrels—nothing that even a pariah sweeper could convert into money.

"They are under the floor in that barn," said Ismail.

"Prove it to me. Krishna! Do you take me for a small boy at a cinema? Because you say so, do I think so?"

"Sahib!" They were in the shadow of the mud wall, face to face, the *babu's* hand laid flat against the wall to keep him upright on his bicycle. "If we were seen to enter that place—"

"Very well then, I will summon a policeman."

"It is all very well for you. You have a bicycle. By Allah, if any one saw you, you could ride away. But what can I do?"

"Idiot! Abominable foundling from a thrice contaminated mother! You shall have my bicycle."

"I can not ride it, sahib."

"Yes, I know that. If I knew you could, I would not let you have it. Take it. Lead on. Lift it. Carry it inside and set it down for me against the barn."

"But I dare not."

Cows kick suddenly, but not with the speed nor the unexpectedness that lurk in Chullunder Ghose's right foot, used to tramping under his enormous weight and to hoisting him easily over obstacles. It shot forth and was back beside the other foot so swiftly that the degenerate Hillman only knew his stomach hurt him, and that the earth had risen unexplainably; it had hit him as a bat hits a ball, from underneath with a thud. It jarred his teeth. He had no breath with which to name the name of Allah.

"Lead on," said the *babu*. "Lead the way in. Crawl in. If your ancestors should see you they will recognize you down on all fours. No one else will. I will bring the bicycle."

So Ismail crawled into the compound, and the *babu* carried his precious machine for fear of rusty nails that might puncture the tires. There was enough of the heaped up litter to provide cover for Ismail.

"They will kill you if they see you," he whispered from behind the ruins of an old Ford body.

"If they should, the police would accuse you," the *babu* answered. "Do you think I was absurd enough to enter your back yard without informing the police where I was going? You had better pray to Allah for my long life. Go into

the barn and see if any one is in there. Should there be—and if he kills you—count on this *babu* to weep a little; such a good scheme will have gone wrong."

Ismail obeyed. He whispered from within the barn. He stuck his head out of the hole in the wall he had crawled through, after moving away a broken crate.

"Come, sahib, there is no one in here."

"Who are you to give me orders? Are the rifles in there?"

"Yes, sahib. They are under the timbers of the barn floor. Come and see them."

"Show me one. One is enough. Stick it out through the hole. If you don't, I will call a policeman and say I saw you put the rifles in there."

PRESENTLY the butt end of a British service rifle was thrust through the hole for the *babu's* inspection. He was careful not to touch it with his fingertips. He let it rest on the sleeve of his coat while he examined it to make sure it was new and had been stolen recently. Ismail was quite capable of having brought him to an ancient cache, for the sake of only Allah knew what treachery.

"Put it back and come out," he commanded. Then, as Ismail emerged, "How many rifles?"

"Many."

"Ammunition?"

"Much of it."

"Um-m-m. Each rifle and each cartridge worth its weight in silver—plus a premium for distance—plus another premium for local competition. Krishna! If I could depend on you to hold your tongue, I might remove those rifles to a safer place. I might sell them. I might pay you a percentage."

Ismail, on hands and knees again, led the way out of the compound. He peered long and cautiously in every direction before he stood up in the shadow of the wall. Then, tempted for the moment to forget he had been kicked by a despised Bengali, he asked—

"How much percentage?"

Chullunder Ghose promptly insulted him.

"Dog! Unbeliever in your own religion! Belly crawler! Such percentage as you earn, and no more! I will pay by results—by results, do you understand that? And now listen. Tomorrow, two, or it may be three hours after midnight, I will come and take away those rifles."

"Where will you put them, sahib?"

"Fool. In your house. Where else?" He avoided Ismail's eyes. There was no need to see the indications of panic; he could feel them. "All you have to do is get that barn door open for me. If I find it unlocked, I will enter and remove the rifles. If not, I shall know you are more worthless even than you seem, so I will go away. And since the fault will be yours, and I shall in that case have lost my profit on those rifles, I will betray you to the police as having stolen them. Now, do we understand each other?"

Ismail nodded. Hatred had him by the throat. He hardly dared to speak for fear the *babu* might detect the thought behind the words. However, he needed information.

"How will you carry all those rifles, sahib?"

"I will bring two strong men."

"Only two men?"

"Idiot. Should I bring a caravan of camels? Should I bring a brass band? It is no distance from here to your house; two men and myself can make, if necessary, two or three trips. As for you, I advise you to go to Ali Ahmed and suggest that, though he did not cheat you at the gambling, nevertheless he made a slight mistake. Request that he should rectify same."

Ismail let a smile escape him. It was plain to him that after all the *babu* was a rather simple minded person.

"Has your honor ever dealt with Ali Ahmed?"

"Seldom. But I think I understand him. If you go to him and air your

grievance, that will quiet his suspicion; he will not imagine you are bent on vengeance. Oh, but what a vengeance you shall see when we have taken away those rifles! We shall leave one rifle in there. Some one else shall tip off the police, who will discover it and pounce on Ali Ahmed. They will hang him and his whole crew. Now remember, all you have to do is have that barn door open, tomorrow, two hours after midnight. I will attend to the rest of it."

He rode away, not glancing backward, but his mirror on the handlebar showed Ismail standing near the corner of the compound wall, and Ismail's gestures were as satisfying as the feel of money in the hand. Chullunder Ghose subdued a chuckle that might have betrayed him, because his back might be as indicative of emotion as was Ismail's face. Ismail would reveal the plot to Ali Ahmed; he felt confident of that much.

"This *babu* looks like what U. S. A. Americans call sucker," he said to himself. "Let us hope so—not that hope is any good to bet on."

As he pedaled back toward the crowded streets he looked incompetent, enormous, timid and incapable of humor or of facing life's emergencies with anything but panic. He could clown that perfectly. As he paused by the ramshackle shop where Ali Ahmed sat to watch the world go by, he looked like nothing but a fat fool on a pair of dangerously overloaded wheels. And Ali Ahmed nodded to him, knowing that the All-wise puts ideas, sometimes, into fools' heads, but it takes ability to put them into practise.

IV

IT WAS as difficult to miss Komahta Singh as if he were wearing a uniform. A Sikh policeman who has been cited half a dozen times for valor and a few more qualities is noticeable, even when in plain clothes on a tour of observation of Pathan delinquency. Nevertheless, he was serving his purpose. The Pathans, who saw him coming, saw the point of being reasonably well behaved until he passed. Chullunder Ghose bumped into him, upset the bicycle and saved himself by seizing the policeman's shoulders.

"I must talk to you," he whispered.

So Komahta Singh arrested him for reckless riding. There was a sort of kiosk nearby containing a telephone for police use, and there was room inside to detain a prisoner or the victim of an accident awaiting a summoned ambulance. They entered that and shut the door.

"What is it?"

"Is it true, Komahta Singh, that you expect promotion?"

"No," said the Sikh. But he brushed up his beard with the palms of his hands; it was plain that only modesty prevented him from saying he had earned promotion long ago. "But who knows?" he conceded.

"You would be promoted if you caught the devils who slew the police and the soldiers for the sake of their weapons and boots? And if you found the weapons?"

"That may be," the Sikh answered. "But at least I should get the reward. And I would share that with you."

"You ask too much," said the *babu*. "The reward is mine, if I supply the clue. You Sikhs are gluttons. You get the promotion, which is plenty."

"Maybe—if I did it single handed—" The Sikh grew thoughtful. "How many criminals are there?"

"Many."

"I had better have help."

Chullunder Ghose studied him.

"I am not sure of my information." The remark was insolently pointed; it meant he would tell what he knew in his own way and only on his own terms. "Tell me, would you like to die by hanging?"

"May my soul forbid it!"

"If you knew a man who was to die by hanging, if you knew he was a brave man, who had only killed in anger; if

you knew that all his officers would be delighted should he die some other way and so avoid an ugly trial and a gruesome execution; if it cost you nothing to help him to die gallantly; if, on the other hand, that gallant death should make it easier for you to win promotion by arresting savage murderers—what would you do?"

"Who is he?" asked the Sikh.

"Trelawny, of the 88th."

The Sikh grinned.

"It was he who taught me boxing. See that? It was he who knocked that tooth out. He and I have drunk strong liquor from the same flask. That is the English way of eating salt together. It is not good he should die by hanging like a sneakthief who stabs in the dark. But he should die. He slew an officer. He must die."

"As to that, he agrees," said Chullunder Ghose.

"He agrees, eh? Has he said so?"

"He said so to me."

"Then he speaks like a man. But what of it? Will his religion let him kill himself?"

"Would yours?" the *babu* answered. "His religion is that of a soldier. Let him die in battle."

"How then? Who are you to talk of battles—you who are a Hindu? Were you ever in a battle?"

"This unfortunate *babu* was never out of one, Komahta Singh. Am punching bag of Bad Luck. Was cursed with brains at birth and also with a sense of the ridiculous. In other words, am subject to a mortgage on which the interest is always in arrears. It is only the fools who are fortunate. Trelawny is consistent like myself. I would have killed ten officers, not one, if I had been disciplinee. I pity him."

"I also pity him," the Sikh said solemnly. "Nevertheless, I would slay him myself, although I like him. He who slays his officer is self-condemned."

"True. Also, he who talks of pity, and of friendship, but who acts as if justice were unjust, that one is certainly self-estimated. He has lice in his heart. He may talk like a Sikh, but he lives like a politician. I insult you. I will get the hell from here, as U. S. A. Americans observe when the baloney nauseates. You may open the door."

THE Sikh brushed up his beard again.

"You speak in riddles, *babu-ji*. You wish—"

Chullunder Ghose pouted his lower lip and looked scornful.

"Wishing butters no *chupatties*. I have offered you a chance to win promotion, while you do an act of mercy for a man who must die for his dreadful mistake. I see I made an error in selecting you."

"So? Did you? Tell me more of this."

"Trelawny will escape," said the *babu*—suddenly and looking straight into the Sikh's eyes.

"I will have nothing to do with it."

"You fool, who asked you to ruin your own life? Should you see him escape, would you follow him? Yes! If he should lead you to the lair of murderers, and to the store of rifles they have stolen; if they should attack him; if he should resist them—would you take sides with him or with them?"

"I would do the most difficult first. That is an easy riddle."

"There will be two weapons needed," said the *babu*. "He will have none."

"Nevertheless," said the Sikh, ironic humor slowly dawning in him, "there would be a devil of a lot of questions to be answered afterward if some one should lend him a government weapon. Can he fight with a *tulwar?*"

"He wishes to die," said the *babu*. "If he had a pistol he would very likely shoot his way back to the gallows by killing all his opponents. Worse still, he might shoot himself. If he should do that first or last there would certainly be an inquiry as to where he got the pistol. Whereas—"

The Sikh interrupted:

"If he fought well, and perhaps were

not slain, who would hang him afterward? He will have a chance for life as well as death. I will get him a *tulwar.*"

Chullunder Ghose noticed the change of tense but made no comment on it. He accepted what the gods of fortune gave and drove his bargain home.

"You may depend on me to be an expert witness when it comes to the matter of your promotion. I get the cash. You get the credit, the praise and the increase of pay that will go with your new rank. That is understood between us. Very well then. Two hours after midnight, tomorrow, be outside the wall behind the row of cells where Trelawny is. Then, when the camels—"

"Camels?" the Sikh objected.

"I said camels. When the camels stampede and the guard turns out to stop them milling through the barracks, you will see Trelawny climb out through the window of his cell. If you are watchful, you will also see me—or you may not; that depends on circumstances. Follow him."

"But are you sure," the Sikh demanded, "that the murderers will be where you imagine that they will be?"

"You insult me," said the *babu.* "What am I—a blind man trusting to a deaf one to deliver me from din? I am efficiency expert. Listen. I have made it understood that I will go tomorrow night to steal that cache of rifles; and my confidant is no good. He is so no-good that he will go inevitably to the criminals and tell them. He is so no-good that there is no need to exterminate him. And besides, we shall need him afterward as a witness to convict the master criminal, against whom he will turn like a rat in a trap when the others are slain. The master criminal will have an alibi. He is a fool who thinks that camels are an alibi and not a lot of crabs on crooked stilts. You may believe me—"

"But I do not," said the Sikh. "It will astonish me if you are not a liar, or a dreamer, or else a lunatic."

"Am all three. Also acrobat. You should have seen me kick that dissolute informer in the belly."

"Nevertheless, I will pretend to trust you—this once—just in case you may be right by accident."

"Myself am accident of nature. Should have been a cabinet of statesmen solving problems of at least two hemispheres. However, God is evidently willing that the world should stay in trouble.

"As I was about to say, after you have put your prisoners and corpses in the *kana,* same including Sergeant Dick Trelawny, dead or living, and with genuine Sikh modesty, avoiding discussion, you make your report and apply for temporary leave of absence to recover from exhaustion, you follow me; and, tactfully observing whom I indicate, you pounce on and arrest the master criminal, with whom you presently return to make a fresh report. You may believe me, you will be promoted."

"Swiftly. Why not?"

"*Verb. sap,*" said the *babu.* But the Sikh thought that was a Hindu magic charm-word and was puritanically upset.

"You should clean your mouth," he answered.

"Clean your pistol, if you have one," said the *babu.* "Self am noncombatant; am general in brass hat ordering the sons of other people's mothers to behave like wild beasts. Rome was nothing to it; Nero was an amateur—but you probably never heard of him. Am super-Nero—*Caesar, salutamus*—go ahead, salute me—let me out of here—am busy. But remember, if you wish to be promoted, be there, with two weapons, tomorrow, two hours after midnight."

V

THE attorney blinked through his gold rimmed glasses at Chullunder Ghose, who had invaded the dark little office with all the self-assurance of a Roman emperor.

"And you call this case a good one?" he suggested. "There is neither fame nor money in it. I have seen Trelawny. He confesses he has no chance."

"Did you get your fee?" the *babu* asked him.

"I received a small fee, yes. A sergeant paid it. I believe I will pay it back to him. By Allah, there is nothing to be gained by defending a man who killed his officer, and who hasn't even evidence of provocation. Let the government provide him an attorney. There is nothing in it for me."

"I said it would be profitable, did I not?" Chullunder Ghose asked.

"Yes, you did. You were a liar."

"Certainly. But not that sort of liar. Am, as you know, expert witness, telling truth and nothing but the truth in properly synthetic doses. I said profitable, but I did not say how. Did Trelawny tell you anything?"

"He did not. He sat with his head in his hands on his cot and said he hopes to die as soon as possible. I could get not another word out of him, except that I should talk to you. In the name of the most high, what do you know that can save him?"

"That you have a good excuse to see him once more. You should tell him he will not hang. All is ready as per stipulated settlement of account between him and me. They will let you see him. It is not wise for me to be seen there."

"*Ilhamdulillah!* I am not mad, but I surely shall be if I let you manage me," the lawyer answered. "Not hang? Settlement of what account? Explain it."

"That man saved my life once," said the *babu*. "So I tell you, he shall not hang. But unless you take my message to him, I intend to find another lawyer who shall pouch a nice fat fee that you are too much a Pathan to see around the corner. Pathans are afraid to look around a corner, lest an enemy should chop their nose off, or another enemy should shoot them from behind."

"Talk business," said the lawyer.

"Not unless you promise me to take that message."

"I will take it."

"When?"

"Now. On my honor, I will take it."

"Very well then. If a camel thief, who does a business in stolen rifles that his men obtain for him by killing sentries and policemen in the dark, should be arrested and the evidence against him were as black as his own black conscience, would he hang, whoever might defend him at the trial? Yes. But would he pay a fat fee to his lawyer? Would he not! And would his lawyer not have opportunity to make a great speech in the court-room—a speech that would bring him much criminal business? I demand twenty per cent commission."

"By the Almighty, that is extortion."

"Nevertheless, you will pay it?"

"Can you get me the case?"

"I doubt it. You Pathans are sleepy people. Even for a profit you object to being out of bed between one in the morning and daybreak."

"Try me. In the Name of Names, what ails you? Why this mystery?"

"No mystery at all. But deliver that message. Then, if you are in the Street of Abdurrhaman tomorrow night, between three and three-thirty or thereabouts, or perhaps even later than that, I will get you that case on a basis of twenty per cent commission?"

"I will be there."

"You will pay me the commission?"

"Yes, I promise."

"Since you always keep your promises, then I will tell you a little secret," said Chullunder Ghose.

"Allah! Your secrets all have teeth in them!"

"Not this one. This has honey. That commission should amount to what the sergeant paid you to defend Trelawny. I will pay it to the sergeant. Thus nobody who matters shall be mulcted."

"Allah! You are growing sentimental?"

"Me? Am sentimentalist to Nth. Am masculine sob sister, suckled on the two breasts of Adversity, whose names are Hope and Realism. Both give sour milk, skimmed before you get it. Nevertheless, am addict to the grim stuff. This

babu would rather feel he is the friend of gentlemen with guts, than be an emperor. *Verb.* very extra special *sap.* indeed. Now let me see you start off with the message to Trelawny."

VI

CIRCUMSTANCES, always undependable, appeared to favor Chullunder Ghose, this time at any rate. But he overlooked nothing. All next day he was ubiquitous on his bicycle, observing this and that, and clowning sheer incompetence or frazzled nerves when any one asked his business.

"Tell me, where is any? Must do some business or starve. This belly needs emolument."

He was at great pains to excite the suspicion of Ali Ahmed by passing him several times without stopping to speak. But he spoke to many other people, and he found an opportunity, near noon, to have a short talk with Komahta Singh in a horse stall in the back of Abdul Mirza's sale yard.

"Yes," he said in answer to the Sikh's abrupt, mistrustful question, "insolence of Providence is with us this time, since it can't take both sides. Self am no believer in the gods, who seem to me to need a Henry Ford or else a Roger Babson to explain to them some economics. Nevertheless, I have given rupees twenty to a *mullah,* who is praying for me—so he says."

"To a Moslem *mullah?* You, a Hindu?"

"Why not? Am convertible, like bonds of companies that pay no dividend. I know more about his religion than he does, but he wishes to convert me to it. So I learned, because he is a simpleton, that some one had instructed him to find out what my plans are for tonight. Can you imagine such a suchness? Lying like a white man's servant, I permitted him to guess that it is true that I intend tonight to steal some stolen rifles.

"Mutually basking in each other's confidence, we hinted darkly to each other. He permitted me to learn that some one, not named, actually means to drive a herd of camels into the barracks of the 88th, that *mullah's* purpose doubtless being to persuade this innocent *babu* that, somewhere around midnight, owner of said camels will be elsewhere than in the neighborhood of rifles.

"So he will be. Am I not a danger to him, since he knows I know where stolen rifles are? Ought I not to be assassinated? Certainly. His men must do it. How, then? I should be encouraged to believe that nobody suspects me, so that I shall go ahead and try to steal the rifles. Such a trap is simple. His assassins wait there. I am spifflicated. What to do then with a dead *babu,* who weighs as much as two men? That is the assassins' business.

"Does their master choose to be associated with that problem? Not he. Like a famous general he gives his orders, then retires strategically out of range of big guns in the form of accidents that sometimes happen. Alibi is perfect if he drives his camels into barracks about midnight. There he is. They shoot the camels and he remonstrates. He gives his name. He can prove by a hundred military witnesses that he was there at time when this *babu* is being carved up. He is very careful person. But the funny part of that is that this *babu* has been much more careful. You shall see soon. When you are promoted you must give me little privileges."

"I am trusting you more than I should," said the Sikh. "The odds are ninety-nine to one against you."

"Truly. But the one time I am right is more than worth the ninety-nine mistakes. And let me tell you, that for one man who succeeds because he dares take chances there are ninety-nine who fail because of prudence. Bet on this *babu* and see life."

"See death," said the Sikh.

"What of it? Life and death are two sides of the self-same penny that the gods toss for their own amusement. Heads they win; tails we win. Does it

seem to you silly? Then laugh—but be there at midnight!"

It was almost midnight, and a full moon cast long shadows on a dusty road; the white wall at the rear of the barracks glistened, and a row of small square windows in it looked like black teeth in a white face, when Chullunder Ghose descended like a fat ghost from a covered two-wheeled cart that passed on and left him standing.

Presently he sat down in the shadow of a buttress, hardly visible. There were almost no sounds. In the distance he could hear the singing of a group of soldiers in time to their stride as they hurried to be back by midnight. He chuckled. They sounded drunk. He knew they were not.

Then he chuckled again. The stealthy, soft, elastic stride of nine-and-twenty camels coming in a hurry stirred a storm of dust that made them look like phantoms. They filled the narrow road from wall to wall and nothing but the buttress saved him from being trampled as they strode past, going as if devils were behind them. But he recognized the figure of Ali Ahmed on the leading camel; the moonlight spotted him clearly as he swung the cavalcade around the barrack wall, and vanished.

THERE was one glimpse of Komahta Singh, in uniform, as he stepped from shadow into shadow, crouching where he could observe the window of the end cell. Then, again, a sort of silence broken by the steady footsteps of the sentry on top of the wall, who tramped the full length of it, halted, paused and tramped back, then repeated. It was calculable that the sentry could not see the sheer face of the wall, or three feet of the road at its foot, unless he leaned over to look. He looked the other way, toward the barrack main gate, when the plan leaped suddenly into being and the night grew alive with noisy riot.

Thirty seconds, and an iron bar dropped in the dust at the foot of the wall; then another. An elbow appeared at the window; head—neck—shoulders. Sergeant Trelawny scrambled through and dropped down by a rope made of torn up sheeting.

"That way," said the *babu*, pointing. "Walk along this wall until you reach that shadow. Cross the road then, slowly; don't run, or the sentry may give the alarm. There's a gap in the wall on the other side of the road. Go through that and wait. I will follow."

There was plenty of time. Commotion at the barrack gate was increasing and the sentry on the wall stood on tiptoe, straining to see what the trouble was. It sounded as if the guard had turned out in a hurry to put half a drunken regiment in clink. Trelawny waited in the field beyond the gap. Chullunder Ghose bestowed an Afghan blanket on him.

"You're a white man," said Trelawny. "Now what?"

"Follow me, but keep your distance. And if you are followed, take no notice. There will be a weapon for you, all in good time."

"Weapon?" said Trelawny. "I don't want a weapon. Fix me up a decent way to cheat the gallows. Me—I wouldn't raise a hand if I was overtook."

Chullunder Ghose shuddered perceptibly.

"It is arranged that you shall fight the men who murdered many soldiers for their rifles."

"So? That's different. You in on it?"

"Noncombatantly — absolutely. Let us hurry."

"Lead on."

So the *babu* led by devious, deserted byways to the alley where the gambling house of Ismail showed one dim light in the corner of a shuttered window. It was only then that a big policeman gained on them. Komahta Singh had followed with a scouting stealth that very few big men can master, but he thought it time now to assert himself.

"Don't speak to him," Chullunder Ghose commanded as the Sikh drew nearer and the *babu* waited, so that all

three came within one shadow.

"What now?" the Sikh asked gruffly.

"Big fool!" said the *babu*—obviously nervous. "Did I need to tell you not to wear a uniform, you mutton eating Jat? Oh, Krishna! Take my cloak and hide your imbecility! Is that a *tulwar* in your hand? Then give it to my friend here, who is nameless. Both of you follow the wall to that gate on the right near the end. Beyond the gate is a littered compound. At the far end of the compound is an old barn. In the barn your hosts are waiting for you. I will wait here."

"Come and show us, *babu-ji.*"

"I will not. Am noncombatant."

The Sikh grew truculent. Foreknowledge of a fight in store had drawn to the surface other than the civilized emotions.

"I will make you show us!"

Then Trelawny forgot to be silent. He reached out his hand for the *tulwar:*

"Dammit, I'd as lief fight you as any one. He's my friend. Come on—show me what we're here to do. He may do as he pleases. Goodby, *babu-ji,* and thank you kindly for the good turn."

Komahta Singh grunted and followed the wall. Trelawny shadowed him. Chullunder Ghose tiptoed after them in sudden panic.

"Wait!" he almost screamed, although it sounded like a whisper. "I have not told you. You should find the barn door open, but the yard is full of obstacles, and there is no knowing whether the Pathans will be lurking behind those or inside the barn. Have you a flashlight?"

"Do you take me for a *babu?*" the Sikh answered. "Silence, you fool!" He led on again.

The *babu* crouched against the wall and bit his sleeve to keep his teeth from chattering.

"This being anybody's friend is sillier than gambling! Nevertheless, I gamble always. I am always being damn fool friend to some one. This is detestable. As racketeer I am a first rate bellyful of squeams. Oh, Krishna!"

He heard sounds. Curiosity compelled him to creep nearer.

"As a coward I am a first rate trouble hunter. Fat fool, but I love it. Life is like this."

Suddenly it dawned on him that in common with all conspirators and captains of intrigue he had forgotten something. The Achilles heel is universal, nothing in the realm of thought or action being perfect.

"Am imbecile, dammit to hell! I forgot that hole behind the packing case! Must block it; must do my part; come on!"

IRON in him mastered nerves that tortured like a toothache. Even his teeth ceased chattering as he compelled himself to creep into the yard and stoop there, peering around the broken body of a motor car. He saw Trelawny and the Sikh like shadows stealthily approaching the door of the barn, which stood slightly ajar, the opening showing like a broad, mouse colored pencil stroke. Then he heard the Sikh's voice:

"Who is in there? Come out!"

There was no answer, except Trelawny's sullen:

"Stay here if you want to. I'll go in and—"

He was swifter than his words. The door opened inward as he kicked it—just enough to let him pass through. Some one tried to shut it after him. Komahta Singh was caught against the jamb and had to struggle to force his way in. Then the door did slam shut.

"Krishna! Oh, why was I born without a thirst for blood!"

Chullunder Ghose leaped from the shadow and fled. His legs went one way and his heart the other. Suddenly the heart within him triumphed. He stopped —turned back. His legs obeyed him.

"Trelawny said it. Yes he did; he said I never let a friend down. Here goes!"

He went like a ton of calamity, cantering because emotion rose and fell within him like the pulsing of reagents in a chemical retort. He reached the packing case set close against the barn wall,

sat down, his back against it, and stuck his heels into the dusty earth.

"O my liver! O my soul, but this is awful!"

Noises like the thumping in a shambles and the terror stricken grunting of brutes in the panic of death came through the barn wall. There were muffled oaths.

"Imagination, O you miscreant! Why was I born with imagination?"

The *babu* shuddered at each thud that told a blow had gone home, probably in darkness. Probably Komahta Singh had kept his flashlight in reserve, not daring to betray his own outline, even for a second, until certain that the enemy would not use firearms. Some one inside there had a heavy weapon and was whirling it; it struck the barn wall—shook it.

"Will they break out? Krishna!"

Full in the moonlight lay a heavy baulk of timber that would serve to hold the packing case against the wall far better than human weight and muscle.

"It would also leave me free to run if they should break the wall down!"

Chullunder Ghose leaped at the timber, got his arms around it. It was heavier than he had guessed. Even his abnormal strength could hardly move it, although he strained and strained in terror aggravated by the shouts inside the barn—and at last by a pistol shot.

"No use. Must face music. Oh, my Karma—what a criminal I must have been in former lives, to have such fear in this one!"

He returned. He almost froze midway. The packing case had moved—was moving, jerkily. It toppled forward.

"A Pathan! Oh, Krishna! Goodby!"

But the sturdy legs obeyed. He sprang. He landed, both heels forward, on the back of a Pathan whose feet were still within the hole. As sudden as a struck snake the Pathan writhed clear of him. The *babu*, screaming in an agony of horror, jumped him before he could get to his feet and rolled him over, struggling for a headhold. He got it, locked it in a grip like a python's, used his free hand to reach for the rifle that encumbered the Pathan and wrenched that from the man's grasp. He tossed it away. The Pathan, unencumbered, broke the headhold. Face to bearded face, they clutched each other, speechless, the Pathan's wrists twitching for his long knife and the *babu*, perfectly aware of it, straining with muscle and cunning and weight to crush his adversary's life out.

THE Pathan groaned, writhing in a scissors hold that tortured him and took the breath out of the scream that agony forced through his throat. His frenzied eyes turned bloodshot. With his fists he beat the *babu's* face. He grabbed his hair. He tried to bite him. But Chullunder Ghose knew arts that no Pathan has ever studied—arts that intuition summoned to his aid—and art is nothing if it fails us in the face of frenzy.

Strength, skill—those were mere ingredients. The art was in the almost absolute emotion that the strength and skill obeyed. He groped for a toe hold—lost it.

"You devil," he grunted. "You think with your head!"

So the head was the target. He had to let up on the scissors hold. Swift as a snake in a rat pit, the Pathan reached for his knife. But the *babu* got a double-nelson on him and the yellow fanged, wild eyed face bent downward—downward, while the body writhed and the feet did a frantic dance on nothing. Useless fists unclenched and clenched again, striking impotently. The strained neck cracked like a dry stick, twisting sidewise in a spasm that the *babu's* strength could not resist, then cracked again; suddenly the enemy lay still.

"Have alibi," the *babu* muttered. He was almost breathless. "Was in paroxysm. Can not be in paroxysm and the same place at the same time. Did not kill him. Suicide; that was it, suicide. He should have had his dagger in his right hand."

Suddenly a flashlight framed him in a pool of silver.

"Killed him, did you?"

"No, no!"

Feet well straddled, Komahta Singh stood smiling, showing milk-white ivory within the shadow of a curled black beard.

"Did he hurt you?"

"No, no. I was looking for his wallet. Can a dead man hurt one? It was you who slew him," said the *babu*.

"Nay, nay. I have slain my number. Three I slew. And three fell to Trelawny. This one hit Trelawny with a butt-end and I missed him with a pistol shot."

"But Trelawny—?"

"Dead," said the Sikh. "He is long past hanging. How did you kill that Pathan?"

"I did not. It was you who did it. I will swear you did it," said the *babu*. "Self am absolute noncombatant."

"Are you afraid of vengeance?"

"No, I am afraid of me, I tell you. I have a conscience. But Trelawny—?"

"Splendid. I have never known such fighting. It was dark, and the light was knocked out of my hand. Trelawny went in like a reaper with a scythe, and the darkness was full of his *tulwar*. I had to duck, or he had slain me. By the time I found the flashlight there were three down. Then a fourth man—this one—struck him with a butt end and he fell dead. There were three left."

"Well, what happened to them?"

"I did."

"This one died, I think, from looking at you," said the *babu*. "You will say you slew him—and I hope you get a medal for it. Are you wounded?"

"Not much. I am hurt a little."

"In the feelings? Let me tell you that unless you say you slew this person, I will say Trelawny slew the others—all the others. How would that be? That would take down your pomposity a little. Now, then, what next?"

The Sikh blew his whistle.

"Ambulance," he answered. "There are thirteen rifles underneath the barn floor, *babu-ji*. This is a good night's work."

"You—you think with your belly," the *babu* retorted. "Are you satisfied to chop the tentacles and let the bug live? I am going. Do you know the shop where Ali Ahmed sits all day on the veranda? Very well then, I will be there. After you have turned in your report, come swiftly. Come in plain clothes. And try not to look like a steer in a bull ring who has just tossed twenty matadors."

VII

TWO hours later, in the raw, cold darkness that foreshadows dawn, insisting there shall never be another sunrise, Chullunder Ghose, cleaned, re-turbaned and his bruises hidden beneath grease paint, rode his bicycle in midstreet through the silent, slumbering bazaar. He went deliberately slowly past the street lights, taking care that the police should recognize him, because after midnight, in Peshawar, if a policeman shoots before he challenges, the verdict will be "death by accident".

"And accidents always happen just when this *babu* is turning corner between indigence and wealth! Rupees ten thousand—all mine! No one to divide with, unless Ismail turns state's evidence; he gets a thousand. Corpses all dead. Only got to catch the king rat. Where is Ismail?"

He dismounted in a pool of lamplight. The Pathan attorney, talking to a Sikh policeman, saw him and came in a hurry.

"What now?"

"Twenty per cent," said Chullunder Ghose.

"Allah! I am sick of waiting for you. Where is this mysterious client?"

"He is feeling much more sick than you are, and more mystified," the *babu* answered. "A burning boil on his nose is the least of his troubles. Hold my bicycle."

The attorney would have liked to refuse. He resented acting lackey to a Hindu. But the *babu* thrust the bicycle against his legs and left him standing there, peering into shadows and down dark passages, until a sleepy small boy crept out of a hiding place, tying his dirty, disheveled turban in haste.

"You have been sleeping?"

"No, sahib."

"How often have I told you that the only profitable lie is truth told suitably? I will disband you if you are going to turn out clumsy. You will be fit for nothing but the police force. Where is Ismail?"

"With Ali Ahmed, sahib. He was watching the street from a corner window when your Honor passed his house with those two others shortly after midnight. He followed in great fear. I saw him pause and listen. Then he ran, and I followed him. He ran to the shop where Ali Ahmed stays, and waited until Ali Ahmed came."

"Was Ali Ahmed at all disturbed?"

"He was angry, sahib. His nose pained him. He and Ismail spoke within the house, so I could not hear them. Then they came out, looking furtive, and they both sat down together on the pile of sacks where Ali Ahmed always sits, on the veranda. They are afraid of something."

"Afraid to run, afraid to sit still," said the *babu*. "Here is your money. Go home."

The equivalent of ten cents changed hands. The urchin wrapped the treasure in his loin cloth, grinned and vanished into the hole beneath some steps that was his lair by right of conquest. Presently the big bulk of Komahta Singh came striding downstreet, just a trifle lame but very chesty and as undisguised as a disguise could make him.

"Boy Scouts are annoying—sometimes. But policemen are an irritant that God provides to make us overcome impatience," said the *babu*. "Come on. Walk beside me."

He and the attorney hurried—too fast for the attorney's comfort, too fast for Komahta Singh to keep pace; he was more lame than he looked; the pride in him mastered the pain of a stab in the thigh that had been bandaged by the staff surgeon.

"I will bet you that the fool has ten policemen following him. No matter. Some men," said the *babu*, "must have audiences. Self, am fond of solitaire. . . Now, let me see you act the innocent attorney. And remember, unless Ali Ahmed lands in prison, you will."

"Allah!"

"Prison and disbarment for conniving the escape of Sergeant Dick Trelawny! So be circumspect."

THE attorney had no time to argue with him. Ali Ahmed saw them coming. So did Ismail, on the heap of sacks beside him. The hurricane lamp that hung from a veranda rafter threw soft yellow light on the head of a camel kneeling at the curb of a narrow side street; and it showed their faces—anxious, irritable.

"Is your Honor well?" Chullunder Ghose asked, leaning on his bicycle.

"I am feverish. I sit here for the cool air," Ali Ahmed answered.

"May it refresh your Honor. I have brought the best attorney in Peshawar to receive instructions in the matter of your Honor's camels that I understand the military have shot dead."

"Allah! Then your understanding is at fault. Some drunken soldiers, who had scared my camels, herded them and took them to the pound. There was no shooting at all. I will make you repay me the pound fees. It is you who will need an attorney, you treacherous dog of a *babu*. One of the soldiers mocked me, saying it was you who—"

"Treacherous?" said Chullunder Ghose. "I pray your Honor's nose is not so painful that it—"

"To the devil with you—you and your attorney!"

But the *babu* beckoned up the devil in the form of a policeman so disguised that not a baby could have guessed he

was anything else. Ismail started to run. He leaped from the veranda. But the *babu's* bicycle, apparently bedeviled by an evil spirit, shot into his path and he became a thing of legs and arms and wheels that wallowed in the dust and fought with rat trap pedals that danced a tatoo on his nose. The camel got up and removed himself—a kicking phantom only to be calmed by distance from the scene.

Komahta Singh pounced on Ismail—snapped handcuffs on him.

"So. He is arrested."

The Sikh glanced upstreet to assure himself that five policemen, gathered by a lamp post, had remarked his swift efficiency.

"As a strategist you are a very good policeman," said the *babu.* "That is principal Crown witness. This attorney now will interview a client. Ali Ahmed may instruct him to issue a summons against me for having stolen his store of rifles. Yes, the rifles are all gone, Ali Ahmed!"

"Allah!" Suddenly the man from Kandahar moved, shifting his balance to reach for a weapon in the folds of his cloak. "You treacherous dog!"

He was swift, but the Sikh was swifter. Letting go his prisoner, he sprang; and a revolver shot echoed, harmless, sideswiped by the Sikh's fist as he seized the man's throat. Five policemen left their post of observation by the lamp post and came on the run. Two of them seized the handcuffed Ismail.

"I will tell all!" Ismail whimpered. "Do not beat me! There is no need to apply the rubber hose."

"He will tell all, and a lot more," said the *babu.* "I keep promises, and he will tell twice what he knows for a thousand rupees."

The attorney sprang to the veranda.

"Ali Ahmed is my client," he announced. "He will plead guilty to using firearms, but to nothing else. I will accompany him to the *kana.*"

Ali Ahmed found speech.

"Yes," he said, grabbing at straws, "it is forbidden to use firearms. But I hurt no one. I will pay the fine. You saw. Yes, yes, you are my attorney."

The police formed up around their prisoners and marched away up the street. Peshawar seemed to wake up suddenly and pour its people from a thousand doors to shout excited questions. The attorney, waiting for Chullunder Ghose to pick up his bicycle, whispered to him—

"What have they against him?"

"I won't tell you," said the *babu.* "And I won't tell any one. Let that be Ismail's business. Ali Ahmed is a dirty Afghan blackguard who has kept a corps of murderers to kill men for their rifles, and I hope he hangs. However, it is he who provided Trelawny a chance to escape. He and his camels saved Trelawny from a hanging. So he shall also have a chance. He has a smart attorney, hasn't he? Self am very expert witness in a law court. Laws of evidence are—"

"What is this about Trelawny?" the attorney asked him.

"He escaped. He is dead. He was not found guilty, so he was presumably innocent before the law. He died the way he wished to, and I owe him nothing," said the *babu.* "They will have to bury him with proper ceremony. You, as Sergeant Trelawny's attorney, are to see he gets that."

"And unless you give good evidence for Ali Ahmed," the attorney answered, "I will charge you with plotting Trelawny's escape."

"A Pathan is a child," said the *babu.* "Cease your silly cackle. It was I who warned the military to expect the camels that afforded that poor man his chance to die as you would never have the guts to think of dying. Pay me my twenty per cent, and do your duty by your new client. Self am innocent, noncombatant and absolutely guileless *babu,* pacifist by disposition, philosophically neutral, intellectually sentimental, morally incredulous—and presently about to get as drunk as Bacchus, if you know who he was. Good night."

By the Author of "On the Bottom"

The RING

By COMMANDER EDWARD ELLSBERG

SERGEANT Gerrity, dozing over the top of his desk, sat suddenly bolt upright and stared through the door of the station house. The sharp rap of a nightstick on the pavement rang through the early morning stillness, mingled with a gruff exclamation—

"Another pass at that guy an' I'll use this stick on you 'stead o' the sidewalk!"

The desk sergeant, instantly alert, motioned to a policeman on the bench at the back of the room.

"Quick, Mike. Give him a hand."

But before the sleepy Mike Dugan had come to enough to get on his feet, the fighting group outside lurched through the door and brought up against the desk.

Sergeant Gerrity's jaw set grimly as his eyes traveled from the battered face and torn clothes of a man staggering through the door, obviously the victim of a brutal assault, to the struggling sailor whom Patrolman Martin with difficulty was holding up to the desk. Mike Dugan stepped heavily up and seized the prisoner's left arm.

"Aizy now, sailor! Cut out the rough stuff 'r ye'll git hurt bad."

"It'll take more'n a couple o' bulls for that!"

The bluejacket, a heavy-set, bronzed boatswain's mate, tore loose from Dugan's grip, whirled round, looked over his shoulder.

"Don't let that guy get outa here, or I'm goin' after him!"

Dugan, startled momentarily at the ease with which his grip had been broken, grabbed the free arm with both hands. He growled out—

"Tell it to the sergeant."

He shoved the prisoner around. The sailor, with a policeman tightly clutching each arm, found himself looking up at the stern figure behind the desk.

"What's yer name?" asked Gerrity gruffly.

The sailor tried to straighten himself up.

"Say, tell these cops to leggo me first. I won't hurt 'em."

The sergeant nodded; the two policemen released their grips. The sailor stretched himself, smoothed out the rating badge on his sleeve which had crumpled in the policeman's clutch, looked malignantly at the civilian complainant, then faced the desk.

"Well, Sergeant, if you must know, it's Tom Austin, boatswain's mate first class, attached to an' servin' on board the U.S.S. *Texas* just come up the river after a cruise with the Pacific Fleet."

Gerrity started jotting it down and, without looking up from his pad, asked:

"An' what's the charge, Martin? Drunk an' disorderly, I s'pose?"

The sergeant stopped writing, poised his pen over the blotter.

"Naw, Sergeant; worse'n that." Patrolman Martin scanned the bruised man who had followed him in. "Assault, attempted robbery an' wreckin' a café. He nearly killed that guy—" jerking his head over his shoulder.

"Wreckin' a café, hey?" Gerrity pricked up his ears. "Where'd you pick him up?"

"Over on Eight' Avenue—George's Place."

"George's Place?" Gerrity leaned over the desk in surprise. "Big George, an' him the toughest bruiser in the district? Never saw trouble get that far there before."

"Well, it did this time. Ye'd think they'd exploded a bomb in that joint, Sergeant. Ye know that ex-pug George has fer a bouncer? I'll be damned if he wasn't stretched out cold; George hisself was hidin' behind what was left o' his bar blowin' a police whistle like mad, an' when I come through the door there was busted tables 'n' chairs layin' round regardless wid this sailor an' that guy over there mixin' it somethin' fierce. I dunno yet how I ever got 'em separated enough to make the pinch."

Austin shook his head to clear the long forelock from his eyes, looked scornfully round at Martin.

"Don't kid yourself, mate. One New York cop pinch me? Say, I been in riots that *was* riots, from Shanghai to Marseilles, with dozens o' foreign bulls gettin' knocked stiff an' the admiral havin' to send ashore the landin' force to restore order, an' I ain't never been pinched yet! Naw, I just came along with you quiet-like for a favor, so long's that bum there come along too."

Gerrity looked down puzzled.

"What in hell's this all about, anyhow? Hey, you, step up here. What's yer name?"

The man in the rear lurched forward, prudently keeping Dugan's huge bulk between himself and his assailant. He was a bad sight, with one eye purple and swollen, his face streaked with blood, several front teeth knocked out, another wobbling loosely as he talked and his left arm hanging limply at his side.

"JOHNNY MARELLO." He wiped the blood from his mouth. "Say, a guy wit'out his rod ain't safe nowheres dese days, Sergeant. I was sittin' in George's kiddin' a dame, 'n' not takin' much notice what's goin' on, 'cept I sees this sailor a coupla tables away can't take his eyes offen me 'n' me lady frien'. Which don't go so big wit' me, 'specially when the blonde I'm wit' starts makin' eyes at him too.

" 'Cut it out, Mamie,' I tells her. 'Who's payin' fer de drinks anyway?' An' I gives that bozo the fisheye to show him to lay off my skirt. But it don't do no good. I kin see him starin' at us steady an' not payin' no more attention to a broad at his own table dat's tryin' to make him 'n if she was

his gran'mother. The way he keeps his lamps on us was makin' me jumpy, an' I was gettin' set to go over an' give him a poke in the jaw so's he'd learn them sailor tricks don't go in George's, when he gets up an' starts fer me.

"Well, Sergeant, I sees from his swagger an' the look in his eye dat trouble's comin'. An' when I gets a good view of 'im on his feet, I sees he's a big guy an' is gonna be tough to handle. So when he's close enough, wit'out takin' no chances, I cracks 'im wit' a beer bottle."

Gerrity dropped his pen, gazed inquiringly at the speaker.

"So you hit him first, hey?"

"Aw, what's the odds if he did?" burst in Austin. "I was gonna sock him if he didn't come clean with—"

"Shut up!" growled Martin. "The sergeant'll git around to you soon enough." He prodded the complainant. "Speak up, buddy. It's your turn now."

"You hit him first, didn't you?" repeated the police sergeant.

"Yeh, I hit 'im first, but it was in self-defense," mumbled Marello. "I only wisht I'd knocked him kickin', fer I finds out soon enough it ain't de dame what's causin' trouble after all—he's tryin' to rob me. Fer about a minute, it's just a roughhouse, wit' dis sailor swingin' a chair on the crowd dat's rushin' him from all sides. I guess dat's when he clipped the bouncer on his bean an' sent him down fer a long count. The next thing I know I'm spread out on the floor, wit' this crazy sailor on top o' me yellin' in me ear—

" 'Gimme dat ring!'

"He grabs at me left mitt an' nearly breaks me finger tryin' to twist off me ring. But dat leaves me an openin' while he's workin' wit' bot' hands on me mitt, an' I pokes me right thumb in his eye so's he's gotta leggo to keep me from gougin' it out. At dat, I manages to get on me feet an' the fight starts all over ag'in, wit' Big George blowin' his whistle, an' de dames screamin', an' fists flyin' an' nobody givin' me a hand, an' dis sailor yellin' fer me to come across wit' dat ring 'r he'll kill me, an' me wonderin' how long kin I keep him away from me t'roat, when in comes a bull at last an' this bird dat's been tryin' to murder me, quits fightin' just like dat."

Marello stopped, choked over something while his mouth started to bleed afresh, then spat out a loose tooth, kicked it across the floor.

"Look at dat!" He glared vindictively at Austin. "You got a stretch in de Big House comin' fer dis job!"

"So you were tryin' to rob this man?" Gerrity scanned the petty officer below him. "You must 'a' been drunk to try to pull a raw job like that right in George's Place. Got any statement before I book ye fer assault an' robbery?"

"Well, I s'pose you can notify Lieutenant Sharp to come an' get me out. He's in charge o' the shore patrol up on Riverside Drive. The lieutenant's offen the *Texas* too, an' he'll tell you I don't go round robbin' no speakeasy bums. Robbery, hell! That ring don't belong to that guy!"

Marello's swollen face twitched; involuntarily his left arm started to swing on Austin, then dropped limply again as a twinge of pain shot through it.

"It ain't mine? So now after beatin' me up, he's gonna make me out a crook! Of all the brass!" He paused a moment for breath. "Say, I've owned dat ring fer more'n ten years. I won it fair 'n' square in a crap game from a bookie out at Belmont Park."

A gleam of interest flickered in Austin's eyes.

"You won it rollin' the bones, eh? Well, maybe you'll sell it then. I'll give you twenty bucks for it."

"Like hell you will! It's not fer sale. I just promised dat little dame you seen me wit' tonight it's hers if she behaves right."

"What? That bat!"

Austin's muscles bulged suddenly under his jumper and he lunged for Marello, but came up short with both Dugan and Martin clinging to his arms again.

For a second the trio struggled, then as quickly as he had flared up, the panting seaman quieted, turned again to the desk.

"Say, Sergeant, do me a favor like a good shipmate. I won't fight no more if you don't let that bird outa here with that ring till you get that Lieutenant Sharp on shore patrol I told you about in here."

"Fer a drunken sailor that's busted up a speakeasy, ye're askin' fer lots at two o'clock in the mornin'. If this man hadn't hit ye first, I'd have you put in the cooler wit'out all this monkey business. What's all the row about anyway if yer not soused an' beatin' up innocent citizens? Is that your ring he's got?"

"Naw, it's not mine, but—"

"Shut up, then! I've heard enough from you!"

Sergeant Gerrity picked up his pen again, looked over to Marello leaning on the rail alongside his desk.

"Where d'ye live, so's we kin git you ag'in fer a witness?"

"Say, Sergeant, listen!" Austin broke in eagerly. "The ring ain't mine, but it ain't his either. It's a Naval officer's ring; look at it yourself."

Something in the earnestness of his voice made Gerrity pause in his questioning.

"Lemme see that ring," he ordered.

PAINFULLY Marello lifted his left arm high enough to clear the desk, shoved his hand, palm down, out over the blotter. A massive gold ring tightly encircled one finger, with a huge sky-blue turquoise standing sharply out against a deeply carved background. Gerrity leaned closer, examined the somewhat worn setting. On one side of the ring was a seal of some sort, surmounted by a trident; on the other side were plainly cut a steering wheel, a fouled anchor and some other nautical insignia not easily distinguishable.

It was a large ring even for a man, and certainly an unusual one. The sergeant examined it closely, twisting Marello's hand first this way, then that, in spite of the evident pain of the owner. Finally he pushed it away.

"Where d'ye say ye got it?" he asked.

"From a bookie, a long while ago," explained Marello eagerly. "He won it from an officer, he said; somebody who'd lost his roll already that day an' put up the ring on the last race, an' lost dat too."

A look of utter scorn covered Austin's face.

"Say, boy, if you knew the first thing about the Navy you wouldn't spin a yarn like that. An officer bet his class ring on anything? You don't know them lads from the Naval Academy. They'd die first!"

Gerrity shook his head wearily.

"I dunno. Some men when they go followin' the ponies fergit everything just like when they're chasin' women. An' I s'pose officers ain't no better that way 'n anybody else. I seen plenty, when I was wid the Army in France, who wasn't so much."

"Well, Sergeant, you're not talkin' about the officer who owned that ring, lemme tell you. You say you was in the Army? See here, you remember when they was loadin' troops by the thousands over in Hoboken back in 1918?"

"1918?" A pained look came into Gerrity's eyes. He nodded slowly. "Remember 1918? Will I ever fergit it! The way they packed us in like sardines in them transports an' shipped us through the war zone gives me the shivers yet when I think about it."

"It does, hey?" exclaimed Austin. "Well, maybe you'll understand what I'm talkin' about then. You doughboys gettin' the willies sailin' once through the war zone! Hell, I was on a destroyer them days, an' we was in the war zone all the time, convoyin' you guys on the transports through the U-boat huntin' grounds. An' none o' you got torpedoed an' sunk on the way over, neither, d'ye know that?"

"Say, officer, what's all dis got to do

wit' me?" interrupted Marello. "How about leavin' me beat it now?"

"Pipe down an' you'll learn quick enough," growled Austin savagely. "If you been wearin' that ring for ten years you can stand by a coupla minutes findin' out somethin' about it before you go passin' it on to any bats!"

Marello, taken aback by the boatswain's mate's fierce tone, looked uncertainly from Gerrity to the door, but the sergeant shook his head.

"Wait awhile." He turned his eyes again on Austin. "Make it snappy. What's on your chest?"

Austin brushed the tangled hair back off his forehead, leaned over the desk, looked intently over Gerrity's fat figure sprawled out over the blotter.

"Times has certainly changed with you since you was a doughboy," he muttered, half to himself. "Still, bein' as you was once wit' fightin' men, I guess maybe you'll see what I'm gettin' at quick enough. As I was sayin', I was on a destroyer, the *Fairfax,* durin' the war, an' we was workin' outa Brest, convoyin' transports. An' that was a tough life for the crews, believe me, mister. No high sides, no promenade decks like them transports had; no armor belts nor lots o' watertight compartments like the battlewagons—just a lotta little spitkids runnin' around packed full o' engines an' boilers, an' wit' their main deck so close to the water that we was always takin' seas acrost even when the big boys we was convoyin' were runnin' along as steady as if they was steamin' in a millpond.

"An' when the weather wasn't so good, an' we was zigzaggin' at thirty knots off the bows o' them transports, we took green seas down the stacks, but we kept goin', some of us sicker'n dogs an' heavin' our guts up the way our boat pitched an' rolled in them waves.

"It was a tough life in that line o' boats, an' we had a tough crew aboard the *Fairfax,* from the captain down; that is, most of 'em was tough except a few like me, who was servin' our first hitch, just ordinary seamen them days right outa the training station to the roaring madhouse full o' machinery which was what that *Fairfax* was, an' me not two months off the farm. There I was then on a destroyer, poundin' the seas, fair weather an' foul, always lookin' for periscopes an' expectin' to be blown to hell every minute we was out by some U-boat we couldn't see.

"Life for me was sure a nightmare on that destroyer. Even the old-timers on the boat was seasick part o' the time—an' me! Say, mates, I hate to think of it, even now. Was any o' you lads ever on a destroyer?" He looked from the battered civilian to the bluecoats around him. "No? Well, you're lucky then, lemme tell you. All I wanted to do when that bucket commenced to shimmy in them seas was to crawl off some place where nobody could find me—under a torpedo tube maybe—an' die in peace.

"But did I get a chance? Like hell I did. There wasn't a spot on the deck you could caulk off wit'out bein' washed overboard, an if you stretched yourself out in your bunk, which was back aft under the fantail, you got the vibrations o' the screws on top o' the heavin' an' the pitchin' o' that hooker, an' a little o' that would soon turn even a good sailor green under the gills.

"An' then as you lay there, not carin' a damn who wins the war if only they'll do it quick, absolutely ready an' willin' to cash in, an' feelin' so miserable in every inch of your body, from your toenails to your hair, you know you just can't ever get up again, some boot comes along, beats you on the tail through the bunk bottom an' sings out:

" 'Turn to, sailor! Your trick at the wheel.'

"AN' THAT was worst of all. Many a trick I stood on the bridge at that wheel, as high as you can get on a destroyer 'less you climb the mast, with the ship jumpin' under my feet as if she was gonna roll her sticks out, the waves

poundin' in over the focsle gun, an' the wind screamin' past the weather clothes an' whistlin' aft through the halyards; an' all the time me sick enough to die, but still hangin' on to that wheel, holdin' her up to the seas when I should 'a' been down in the sickbay.

"An' why? Because our skipper was hell on wheels, with no more regard for a groggy sailor 'n you might have for a sick alley cat. He was a big guy hisself, over two hundred pounds, good lookin' too. They told me on the ship the record he'd made once back in Annapolis throwin' the hammer ain't never been beat. A two-an'-a-half-striper he was, just been made before I joined the ship, an' the weight o' them stripes was restin' heavy on every man in the crew.

"A reg skipper if there ever was one, an' tryin' to run that spitkid as if she was a battlewagon—quarters every mornin', bag inspection every Saturday with non-reg shoes an' clothes goin' over the side into the drink, torpedo 'r gun drills all day long between watches at sea, an' God help the sailor who gets back late from liberty when we was in port, which was damn little.

"I hadn't stood two tricks at the wheel on my first trip outa Brest when I draws the skipper on my watch. We're kickin' along at full speed, steamin' in formation with the flotilla on our way out to pick up some transports about four hundred miles offshore. I'd just come over from Newport with a draft on a transport myself, an' I'd been feelin' that I was a sailor already, till that destroyer got clear o' the harbor an' started to do her stuff.

"There I was, spinnin' the spokes on that bronze steerin' wheel, with the horizon dancin' up an' down across the jackstaff, the deck sinkin' away under my feet every other second, my stomach startin' to have that 'gone' feelin' ag'in, an' my mouth commencin' to water. Finally I can't hold it no longer, an' since I can't leave the wheel to make the lee rail, I lets go everything I've eaten in a week, tryin' hard to shoot it over the top o' the weather clothes for'd o' me.

"But the wind catches it an' shoots it back, all over me, the binnacle an' the steering wheel—an' the bridge is sure a mess.

"It leaves me pretty weak, so I looks round for the quartermaster, expectin' to be relieved so I can go below, but instead o' that, the skipper pipes up:

" 'Tell that farmer to keep a bucket handy his next trick. An' when his watch is over turn him to with a swab to clean up before he lays below.'

"I took a dislike to the skipper then an' there, an' as time went on an' the *Fairfax* wallowed back an' forth across the war zone, I didn't have no occasion to change my mind. We was just fresh-caught kids on that boat, lots o' us, with no more idea o' what the regulations an' Naval discipline was about than us boys had about proper etiquette at the court o' St. James. But did that make any diff'rence to our skipper? Not so you'd notice it! Deck courts, summary courts, no liberties, an' most o' our pay docked; he kept handin' 'em out to us every time we broke some damn regulation we didn't know nothin' about 'r have sense enough to observe if we had known it, just as if we'd been a bunch o' old-timers in the service instead o' a lotta schoolboys tryin' to do our bit to help win the war.

"It sure seemed like a hell ship to us youngsters, an' lots o' the gang in the draft that come aboard with me began to hate the skipper so much we'd gather top o' the galley deckhouse at night, huggin' the lee side o' the smokestacks to keep warm an' outa the wind, an' figger out over an' over ag'in, how, when the war was ended an' we was paid off back in States, we could get together once more, catch that guy outside the Navy Yard gate some dark night an' beat hell outa him.

"An' so it went along. If there's any glory in a war, you'll never find it in destroyers anyhow. In an' out, from the edge o' the war zone into Brest with the

loaded transports, from Brest ag'in four hundred miles out to sea with the empty troopships goin' back for another load: life aboard ship nothin' but the shrill roar o' the forced draft blowers ringin' in your ears night an' day while you kick along through heavy seas on nothin' more 'n a few pieces o' sheet iron wrapped tightly round a lotta machinery; an' all the time, to drive us wild, that cap'n with his spit-'n'-polish discipline an' no relief even when we're in port, 'cause none o' us ever rates liberty.

"The only thing that keeps us from open mutiny on that bucket is the wild hope that some day we'll meet a U-boat tryin' to sneak under our destroyer screen for a shot at the transports, an' we'll see some o' the action that we joined the Navy for. But the U-boat skippers is wise—they ain't anxious to die by gettin' where a whole flotilla o' destroyers can camp on their wakes droppin' depth bombs. So the months go slowly by an' we never see a periscope.

"A few o' the wilder youngsters on the boat begins to get desperate. There don't seem to be no chance o' the war ever endin', the skipper's ridin' us harder 'n ever, an' life just don't seem to us worth livin'. If it'd been the old Navy, a heavy block would 'a' come crashin' down from aloft on the skipper's bean, accidental-like, but on a destroyer that ain't a possible solution.

"An' then one day while we're lyin' in Brest, ponderin' that problem as the boilers 'r' steamin' up for us to get under way with the outbound convoy, the word flies round the ship that we're detached from the Brest squadron, with orders to proceed to Queenstown to work outa there on the anti-submarine patrol west o' Ireland.

"Any change looks good to us. Maybe in Queenstown we can make a fresh start; perhaps if luck's with us, we might even get a new skipper; an' at any rate the chances o' mixin' it with U-boats in that area is lots better, so we gives our shipmates in the old flotilla four long blasts on the whistle an' go steamin' outa Brest all by ourselves for once, with all hands wavin' their watch caps an' feelin' better every minute the further we sink Brest below the horizon.

"WE HEADED north, cleared the cape, stood across the mouth of the Channel for Ireland, loafin' along at twenty knots with not a ship in sight nowheres an' the whole ocean to ourselves. I come on the bridge at eight bells in the afternoon for the first dog watch, relieved the wheel, an' found the skipper hisself takin' the deck—one of our watch officers had been left behind in the hospital at Brest.

"We steamed along about as usual, well out into the Channel, with a fairly heavy sea runnin' an' gettin' worse as the watch drags along. At four bells it's nearly dark, an' all hands lays below for chow 'cept the bridge watch an' the few men stationed as lookouts aft.

"By that time there's whitecaps all around, with spray blowin' constantly over the port bow as our high focsle smacked each wave. It kept me pretty busy holdin' her on her course, but I snatched a look every once in awhile at the skipper over on the lee side o' the bridge, tied up like the rest of us in one o' them windbreaker suits an' scannin' the horizon with his binoculars for periscopes, which o' course there ain't a chance in the world to spot with all that sea runnin'.

"I ain't been that clost to the skipper since he had me up to the mast two days before an' handed me another deck court for bein' a few minutes late returnin' from the one liberty I'd had in a month an', as I watched him, I sorta played with the idea o' how it would feel to wrap one o' them Irish shillelahs round his head when we got to Queenstown.

"An' then we got it. Nobody'd seen any periscope, nor did we ever see any sign of a U-boat. Just a streak o' bubbles clost alongside, an' before anybody could do a thing, a terrible roar, the

Fairfax heaved up 'midships, broken in two, an' I guess the pieces must 'a' kept right on for the bottom without losin' any o' that twenty-knot speed they'd been makin'.

"What happened I dunno. The explosion stunned me, I s'pose. All I remember is that I suddenly come to in the water with the waves breakin' over my head an' no ship in sight any more—just some bubbles an' froth an' somethin' of an oil slick spreadin' over a patch o' sea to leeward of me. I started to swim automatic-like, without it strikin' me right away that there wasn't no boats nor nothin' to swim to; but after takin' a few strokes an' nearly stranglin' in the rough seas, it begins to sink in that with me bundled up like I am in that windbreaker suit, I ain't rigged out proper for swimmin' far, even under good conditions.

"In a frenzy, I tried to git outa them clothes, but no go. With that piece o' halyard I was usin' for a belt cinched in round my waist, a couple more pieces holdin' the sleeves tight round my wrists, an' with ever' knot shrunk tight in the water, nothin' would come clear. An' all the time I'm sinkin', sinkin', while I fought them knots till it seemed I must 'a' hit bottom myself. Finally I gave up an', with my lungs ready to bust from holdin' my wind so long, I struggled back to the surface for another breath of air, an' nearly choked instead when a big wave hit me an' I swallowed mostly water.

"I kicked out frantically for a minute, but a few more seas washed over me an' knocked out all the fight. Why prolong the agony? My shipmates was all gone. I might as well join 'em in Davy Jones' locker. I turned over on my back as I lifted to the next wave, an' took one last despairin' look around before takin' a few deep gulps o' salt water an' endin' everything quick.

"An' then I didn't. For there in the trough o' the sea a little way off to windward, I spotted a few heads close together clingin' to a spar. I dunno where I got any strength, but the sight o' that spar acted like a shot o' strychnine, an' I begun to fight my way across that hundred feet o' ocean with my waterlogged clothes holdin' me back an' each wave threatenin' to bury me for good.

"I never made it. By the time I was still twenty feet off, I was clean played out an' swimmin' so feebly that instead o' makin' any more headway, I begun driftin' down to leeward ag'in.

"There I was, drownin' fast, with only a few yards away that spar which means a chance to float, to breathe, to live till some ship—an' there's always lots o' ships goin' through the Channel—picks me up, an' not one o' the five men safe on that spar even so much as sayin' a word to encourage me.

"I cursed 'em in my heart—I couldn't open my mouth to yell without gettin' it full o' water—for cowards for lettin' a shipmate drown before their eyes. An' still they clung to that log, watchin' me die. A big sea hits me; I'm so weak now I can hardly lift my head ag'in after the crest goes over me.

" 'It's all over now,' I thinks vaguely, givin' them guys a last look, when one man at the end o' that stick lets go, swims down to me an', after a terrible struggle in the waves, with me not able to help any, manages to get us both back alongside that spar.

"I had barely time enough to hook an arm over it an' lift my head an' shoulders clear o' the water for the first full breath I've drawn since the *Fairfax* was torpedoed, when that spar sorta sinks under me till I'm flounderin' up to my ears once more.

" 'Hang on tight, but keep down in the water as far as you can! This mast won't float much.'

"LIKE a flash it comes over me why the gobs on that spar acted the way they done, an' I looked round at the man who'd hauled me in, to see which one o' my old shipmates'd had the guts nevertheless to take a chance on sharing his

hold on life with me.

"An' it's the skipper!

"When I thinks what I'd been figgerin' on doin' to him only a few minutes before, I sure felt like a yellow dog. But I didn't have much time to waste thinkin' about that nor nothin' else, 'cause it was plain right away we was all in trouble. There was six men now clingin' to that piece o' busted topmast—and that was one more than it would hold. Apparently before I come over, it would just float with the five men who was hangin' on to it holdin' their heads enough outa water so they could just breathe. Now with me hangin' on to one end next to the skipper, it was just one man too much, an' the mast went awash under us, leavin' all hands gaspin' an' chokin' as the waves drove by.

"Nobody said nothin'. For a few minutes we struggled to help things, spreadin' ourselves out evenly over that twenty-foot piece of topmast that had floated clear o' the wreck, but it was no go; there wasn't enough buoyancy in that stick. With six drownin' men hangin' to it as the waves rolled by an' tryin' to keep their heads high enough outa water so they wouldn't strangle, we fought to get ourselves balanced out so she'd float us, but it was hopeless.

"It didn't take long for every one to see that somebody'd have to let go or we'd all drown. An' I could see the gobs beyond lookin' at me with a wild gleam in their eyes that meant just one thing: I was the last aboard; so far as they was concerned, it was up to me to get off 'r they'd knock me off.

"I dunno how it is, but havin' just come back to life, so to speak, a fierce desire to keep on livin' had gone all through me, an' I was ready to fight for a hold on that mast with anybody. The four gobs beyond me started to edge in an' I could see that there was gonna be a battle for the privilege o' hangin' on to that log, with the loser givin' only a few gurgles an' then goin' right down to join his shipmates inside the sunken *Fairfax.*

"I took a firm grip with one hand around that spar an' stood by for a husky swing soon's the nearest man gets in range, when the cap'n, who's behind me, sings out:

" 'Belay the fightin', men. Austin, gimme your hand a minute.'

"A little surprised, they all stopped, an' I can see them heads yet, bobbin' in the sea, barely showin' above water, an' all starin' past me at the skipper on the far end.

"I shoved my mitt slowly along the mast toward the cap'n, knowin' he'd realized at last he'd made a mistake an' was gonna jerk me off into the sea ag'in, an' believin' full well that he at any rate was justified in settlin' matters that way, since he'd dragged me aboard; but when I finally touched him, instead o' yankin' me clear, he only fumbled with my hand in the water a minute, an' then dropped it.

" 'Austin,' he whispers in my ear, very quiet-like, 'give that to my mother when you get home.' An' before I even know what he's talkin' about, he lets go his hold an' starts swimmin' away in the darkness, while the mast, suddenly relieved o' the weight of the biggest man in the lot, comes floatin' well outa water to hold the rest of us up!"

The boatswain's mate paused, looked fixedly at Marello, crouching behind Dugan's broad back, then resumed slowly.

"Like a lotta dummies, we watched him as he rose an' fell, beatin' his way in the twilight up to windward, then a big wave washed over him—an' we didn't see nothin' more except spray. The cap'n was gone.

"I took a fresh grip on that mast, an' was pullin' my shoulders outa water, when my eyes happen to light on my hand, an' there on my finger is the skipper's class ring!"

Austin leaped forward from between the two policemen, seized the startled Marello's left hand.

"I don't know who stole it from me the night I got back after the war, nor how in hell you got it, but there's an

old lady who's been waitin' twelve years now for that ring. Come clean with it or I'll bust you in two!"

Gerrity mopped his brow, leaned heavily forward.

"But are ye sure that's the ring?"

"Sure?" Austin released his victim. "Are you kiddin' me? I wore it myself nearly a year till the war was over, lookin' at it every day, hopin' I was man enough to do my job like the owner o' that ring done his! Sure? Say, I know that ring as far away as I can see it. I'll show you. Our skipper's name was Walter Stone." He seized Marello's arm again. "Toss up the ring, bo. Let the sergeant look inside!"

Marello slipped the ring with difficulty off over his swollen finger, pushed it across the desk.

Sergeant Gerrity picked it up, held it over the blotter, read the worn engraving inside.

"'W.S. U.S.N.' I guess ye'r' right about it, sailor. Well, when that lieutenant on the shore patrol you mentioned gets here in the mornin' an' identifies you, I suppose you can prove ownership." He looked down at the blotter and frowned. "But I'm afraid you're still up against it for assult, if this man presses the charge."

He turned to the battered Marello.

"Assault? After what that bird's been through? Aw, fergit it, Sergeant! An' never mind about holdin' him to prove ownership on dat ring, neither." Marello grinned, a painful grin exposing his missing teeth, stepped up to Austin and seized his hand. "Sailor, I wish you luck. Give the ring to the old lady wit' my regrets fer the delay!"

A Novelette of the Mexican Border

By MALCOLM WHEELER-NICHOLSON

The SABLE

"ALL Ah says is that all the book learnin' in de world ain't goin' to git you nowheres ef you cain't boss folks around—" Corporal Samuel Lee settled dejectedly into his saddle.

"Oh, hush yo' mumblin' an' yo' grumblin'," Sergeant Carter, riding beside him, retorted crossly, staring back at the long column of negro troopers toiling through the white dust of Chihuahua. "Neveh seen such a nigger fo' moanin' an' wringin' his hands as what you is, Sam Lee. Ne'mind if the majah ain't so bossy; he's a majah, ain't he?"

"Take heah now Captain Bates," persisted Corporal Lee. "When that baby sounds off you jest nacherly know that things is goin' to start movin'. He's got a voice like a Missouri jarhead."

"Uh-huh—an' jest about as much sense!" snorted Sergeant Carter.

"But what Ah wants to know, wherefoah are we all traipsin' 'way off from de main body like dis?" continued Corporal Lee, gazing apprehensively at the blue haze of the hills rising before them. "Theah's a powahful lot of Mexicans hereabout—Ah been seein' dust clouds all day. An' dis heah majah of ourn, I ain't got no confidence in him as a fightin' man a-tall, a-tall."

"Hush yo' tongue, Sam Lee. Some of these heah young soldiers will be heahin' yo' speak thataway, an' then wheah's yo' discipline got to? All gone!"

But, despite the strong note of disapproval in Sergeant Carter's voice, there was a reflection in his eyes of the same worried, apprehensive look that shone in Corporal Lee's. The recent disaster at Carrizal was too fresh in every one's mind for comfort for, as a matter of fact, that troop which had been blotted out by the Mexican ambuscade had been from this same regiment.

The squadron moved along at a walk in column of twos, climbing steadily upward through the mesquite and Spanish bayonet like some long, dust covered snake, its drab khaki pricked out here

PHALANX

and there with the scarlet and white of the four troop-guidons and a flash of color from the squadron standard carried behind the commander.

As diminutive officers often will, Major Gerald C. Vernon rode the largest and most raw boned horse he could find, and sat perched up in the saddle, looking, as one of the negro troopers had phrased it, not unlike "a doodlebug on a log". Not by any stretch of the imagination could he be called a martial looking figure; he seemed weighted down with the .45 automatic strapped to his off side, and looked incapable of using the long, straight sword that hung behind his off pommel. His voice, as he answered some question, was no more inspiring than his figure, for it was thin and reedy.

The slightness of his figure was accentuated by the bulk of the man who rode at his left, a huge, powerful shouldered, thick chested officer wearing the silver bars of a captain on his shirt collar. Captain Joe Bates was the heavy handed, loud voiced, confidence inspiring type, and even his ordinary speaking tones carried back past the sergeant-major and the trumpeter and the color sergeant through the first eight sets of troopers of the leading troop.

"The way I figure, Major, we should be about two miles from that river crossing. Hadn't I better go ahead and scout out the place?"

The major nodded his head and gazed about him wearily.

"Yes," he answered. "Take your troop forward and cross that ford. The map shows a hill on the far side. Seize that and hold it for the arrival of the squadron."

"Very well, sir," returned Bates, speaking with exaggerated respect. "Is it your idea, sir, to take the squadron

through the town?" He posed the question as one suggesting a plan to his superior.

"Not yet it isn't," returned the major. "We'll see what the situation develops when we get there. My orders are to search the town for the presence of Villa or any of his followers."

"We're pretty far out, Major, and a long way from any support—if we should happen to run into a large force," said Bates, and his tone transcended that of a man making suggestions to his superior and became that of one who felt the safety of the entire outfit resting upon his shoulders alone.

The major's eyes flicked to the man beside him and away again, but he said nothing.

Swinging his horse out of the column, Bates drew up and waited for the head of his troop to ride by. His lieutenant, a tall, thin West Pointer, raised his eyebrows inquiringly.

"I suggested to little Gerald that I take the troop ahead and scout out this river crossing," said Bates importantly, and gave the signal for "trot".

In a few seconds his troop had swelled into the increased gait and was swinging past the major with much clatter of canteens and tin cups, jingle of bit and spur and curb chain and much white *caliche* dust which sifted over the squadron commander and the men behind him. The detached troop moved rapidly ahead, the noise of its progress dying down as it twisted and turned through the mesa. The major stared straight to the front, glancing from time to time at his point and flankers and connecting files, dotted in couples here and there over the mesa in a rough, spear shaped formation that protected the advance of the squadron.

His face, seen in repose, had something rather scholarly about it, and the eyes which peered through the heavy horn rimmed glasses were alert and observant. It was those eyes which first spotted the cloud of dust far out on the left flank and watched it narrowly. One of the flankers came riding in and the major studied the man as he swung his horse in and out of the cactus and drew up in a cloud of dust.

The negro trooper, vastly important, raised his hand sharply to salute.

"Suh, Majah, theah's a powahful lot of Mexicans 'way out yonder," and he pointed toward the distant dust cloud. "Corporal Johnson done sent me in to repoht."

"All right," returned the major. "Ride back and tell him to keep a sharp eye on them and don't gallop your horse any more than is necessary."

TURNING about to look back at the column, the major could sense rather than see a tremor go down its length as the negro troopers gazed off at that menacing dust cloud on the left flank.

The major was under no illusion as to the danger involved in this expedition. He was already two days' march from the main body and surrounded by enemies concerning whose numbers and disposition he had very little information. Moreover, he had come forward without trains except four pack animals per troop; and problems of forage, food and ammunition pressed heavily upon him. His request for a platoon of machine guns had been denied him, and he had naught but the rifles of his command and practically no reserve ammunition for them.

Again, he was unaccustomed to negro troops and sensed their lack of confidence in him, a lack of confidence that was equaled by his own doubts as to their efficiency. And the whole thing was complicated by the feeling that his officers were not with him. Their attitude was best represented in that of Captain Bates, who was next senior in command. Bates took very little trouble to conceal his lack of respect for the reedy voiced little major. And the major had the feeling that Bates ridiculed him behind his back and made game of his deficiencies.

His eyes roved restlessly to front and flanks as he rode along, and he stiffened slightly in the saddle as he saw that dust cloud increasing in volume and moving rapidly nearer his column.

There was no doubt about it, the Mexicans were coming on and a nervous stir was perceptible along the length of the column. Even the horses reflected the tightening up by flinging their heads and pricking up their ears.

The dust cloud was rolling nearer and was now distant only about eight hundred yards. The major drew forth his whistle and blew a shrill blast, riding to the side of the trail where he found the eyes of the entire column upon him. Their attention once secured, he flung up his right hand with four fingers outspread and moved it up and down. From down the column there came the thump of heels and the strained creak of leather and clatter of equipment as the sets of twos closed up into column of fours.

The dust cloud was rolling nearer until now the forms of men and horses could be discerned. Again the major shrilled on his whistle and followed this by clenching his right fist and driving downward with it toward the ground. There was a sudden bustle of activity down the compact column as men flung themselves out of the saddle, linked horses, jerked their rifles out of the boots and formed in line on the exposed flank.

The major again flung his hand downward, this time with open palm, and the long line of dusty troopers dropped to earth, their rifles shoved forward. There was a brief motion as the soldiers wriggled into firing position and straightened out. Riding down behind the line, the major called each troop commander in turn.

"There is not a shot to be fired until I give the order," he announced in his high, reedy voice.

The troop commanders saluted impassively and transmitted their orders to the riflemen.

The approaching dust cloud had now shredded into high thin spirals and whorls which blew above the heads of the advancing enemy, and revealed a wild looking crew of some three to four hundred horsemen galloping steadily toward the waiting squadron. In the center of the loose enemy line rode a Mexican in silver spangled sombrero and green and red scarf. Upon him the major concentrated, watching the Mexican leader's face as he came nearer and nearer to that ominously silent line of blue steel rifle muzzles.

It was a test of nerve for those negro soldiers as the strange horsemen rode nearer and nearer, and the major's ears were keyed nervously for the first excited shot which would start the whole line into deadly fire upon the advancing Mexicans. His orders were clear, the major reflected. They were not to treat the Mexicans as enemies and only to fire after being fired upon.

But it was a tense and nerve racking business, seeing that force of horsemen thundering down upon them, nearer and nearer. The distance shortened to three hundred yards and then to two hundred, and still the major stared at the face of the Mexican leader. He glanced now and again at his officers and men before him, finding an occasional backward roll of white eyeballs as the excited troopers waited for the word which would permit them to squeeze home the triggers.

But no word came. The distance shortened to one hundred yards, then fifty. In another second it would be too late, for the impetus of the horses would carry them over the line of dismounted men, despite the rifle fire. But the major watched the Mexican leader's face.

And suddenly the Mexican shouted out and waved his arm aloft. There was a sudden clatter and eddying cloud of dust as his followers drew their horses down on their haunches.

Something like a quiver of relief went through the line of riflemen facing them. The major sighed.

For a few tense seconds the two lines of men stared at each other. In the

silence naught could be heard except the labored breathing of the Mexican horses. The major noted one directly opposite him whose sides were dripping blood from the long, cruel Mexican spurs. The dust cloud blew away and still the two lines stared across those few yards at each other.

SUDDENLY the Mexican leader raised his sombrero from his head and swept it before him, bowing low in his saddle. Replacing it, he shouted an order. The Mexicans quickened into movement, backing and wheeling from the press, but turning off to the rear. Another shout came from the Mexican leader, and he galloped around their flank. Without a single backward glance at the American force, he led his men away at a gallop, moving off on the flank again from the direction whence he had come.

The major blew his whistle and waved his hand, palm upward. The signal broke the tension which had gripped the squadron and a murmur of voices arose as the men swarmed back into the saddles.

"Hot dog! Ah shuah thought we was in fo' a ruction! Boy! Did yo' see dem Mexicans ridin' away! Ah shuah thought they was goin' to trample all ovah me! . . "

Excited voices called back and forth down the column until the stern voices of the officers and the shrill whistles commanded attention. It was only when the major rode to the front of the column and called "route order" in his thin voice that the excited clamor broke out again as the column set in motion.

Setting the pace once more at the head of his squadron, the major found himself covered with perspiration and realized for the first time how tense had been the strain of the past few moments.

He well knew that he had delayed too long in giving his order to fire, but such were his orders and he had obeyed them. As he rode along he speculated upon the anomalous position of these American troops in Mexico who had been sent in on this so-called "punitive expedition". While technically not at war with Mexico, they were actually engaged in an invasion of a foreign state. While there was supposed to be a certain amount of cooperation between the Americans and the Mexican authorities, actually no one was certain which way the Mexicans would jump.

The stated objective of the expedition was the capture of Pancho Villa, and in this capture the Mexican government was supposed to assist. But the action of a few minutes ago was a sample of the manner in which their assistance was rendered, and the major was under no delusions as to what would have happened had he shown any lack of firmness. In other words, the Mexican force had tried to bluff him and he had stood fast and refused to budge. Luckily that had ended well. He hoped that the next encounter with them would be as fortunate.

Down in the column behind him there was much discussion over the inexplicable actions of the Mexican force. Corporal Sam Lee was plainly disgusted.

"Theah we lays on our bellies like a row of sardines an' waits for them Mexicans to tromple over us! What kinda fightin' is that, Ah asks you? No, suh, we all's goin' to git into some powahful mean ructions, all on account of that theah half po'tion majah of ourn."

"Oh, hush yo' foolishness, Sam Lee," remonstrated Sergeant Carter, but his tone lacked conviction and his eyes rolled out toward the left flank where that mounted force still followed along, maintaining a distance of a thousand yards or so.

"Supposin' dese heah greasahs takes it into their haids to lay an ambush for us an' commences shootin'? What then?" pressed Corporal Lee. "We all will find ouahselves in de same fix as them boys at Carrizal. Yes, suh, we'll find ouahselves layin' out, bein' patted in de face wid some shovels!"

And so the comment went up and down the column, none of it very commendatory of the major's abilities as a commander. As for Major Vernon, he rode steadily forward, his insignificant figure bowed over in the saddle as he watched ahead for news of Captain Bates' troop. He had not long to wait, for the squadron had covered less than half a mile when messengers rode in with the word that Captain Bates had encountered a large force of Mexicans who were threatening him on the front. Bates asked for instructions.

The trail now led down into a slight depression at the bottom of which was a fair sized spring of clear, cold water. Here the major decided to halt and water his animals, remaining in camp for the night if necessary. Accordingly he sent word forward, ordering Captain Bates to return to the column.

Finding a halting place which could be defended in case of trouble, he gave orders for the watering of the horses and sat on the edge of a dry arroyo while the troops went down successively to the spring.

While this was going on, Bates' troop swung into view and came on in at a trot. Behind the troop the rear guards were flung out in a crescent shaped formation. About a thousand yards to the rear appeared three clouds of dust—dust which rose high in the still evening air as it closed in. After a few minutes the dust clouds died down and the major knew that the Mexican groups had halted.

Bates' report was brief.

"I got within about a quarter of a mile of the ford, Major, when two forces of Mexicans appeared on my right and left flank. Just about that time my patrol sent back word that the ford was held by a force of two hundred and fifty or three hundred and I decided that there were too many to tackle with one troop. What are you going to do, Major?"

Bates eyed his diminutive commander with half veiled impatience. Again the major's eyes flitted over his subordinate and then turned gravely away.

"I'll issue the orders when the time comes," he stated evenly. "In the meantime, please have your horses watered."

So saying, Major Vernon clambered up into the saddle of his raw boned horse and, followed by his orderly, rode out toward the outguards.

Bates turned to his lieutenant as they rode down toward the spring.

"Little Gerald is going out to have a look at the nasty bad Mexicans. I hope they don't catch him and spank him!"

The remark was made half jokingly and the lieutenant knew that he was expected to laugh; but instead he flinched a little and glanced backward at the head of the troop, where the first sergeant and the guidon sergeant were well within earshot. The lieutenant's motion was lost upon Captain Bates, however, for he continued to voice his opinion of the squadron commander in no uncertain terms.

THE squadron had finished watering by the time the major rode back. He had little to say and none knew what was on his mind until he gave the order to make camp. The lavender haze of dusk was beginning to settle over the mesa when the squadron filed sedately into column of troops, guidons were aligned and the command "pitch tents" issued. There followed a brisk and busy ten minutes of silent activity, which eventually culminated in four lines of khaki shelter tents and four picket lines crowded with horses munching busily in their nose bags.

Cook-fires lighted up the fast gathering darkness and the cheerful odor of boiling coffee and frying bacon stole over the mesa.

His supper finished, the major strolled down to examine his horses. In the course of his travels he stopped opposite a shelter tent before which was a white soldier.

"Who are you?" asked the officer.

"First Class Private Sosthenes Pan-

goulos, Medical Corps."

"Are you a Greek?" asked the Major.

"Yess, sar."

"What part of Greece are you from, Pangoulos?"

"Macedonia, sar."

"So? That's where Alexander the Great came from," commented the major.

"Yes, sar," returned the soldier, a pleased smile flashing over his dark features. "The Major hass heard of him?"

"Of course," returned the diminutive officer, and turned away toward his own tent.

The chill of the Mexican uplands was beginning to put a nip into the air as he went toward his tent, and he saw that Bates and several of the officers had scared up some brush and had a cheerful blaze going. Around this they were seated, leaning against their saddles and cleaning up the remnants of their supper from their mess kits. They stood up politely as he entered the circle of firelight and asked him to join them, which he did, grateful for the warmth.

There was an awkward silence as he sat down, a silence which he broke by remarking upon the presence of the Macedonian Medical Corps orderly.

"Strange that the only white soldier in the squadron should be a Macedonian," mused the major aloud, his audience forgotten at he stared into the fire. "Why, he might be a descendent of one of the *hoplites* of Alexander the Great."

"What's a *hoplite,* sir?" asked O'Brien, the lieutenant out of Captain Bates' troop.

"A foot soldier," returned the major absently. "One of the sixteen men in a *lochos,* which stood sixteen deep in the phalanx. Four *lochos,* sixteen files deep, made a unit which corresponds to our platoon. Two of these units combined into a battalion, and formed into the phalanx. The men carried twenty-one foot spears."

"How big was the phalanx?" asked O'Brien, frowning a little at the ill concealed grin of derision upon Captain Bates' face. O'Brien was interested.

"Oh, some four thousand men in ranks sixteen deep, in addition to auxiliaries, light armed troops, archers, bowmen and cavalry," the major replied promptly.

"In other words, the phalanx was a sort of reenforced brigade, sir?" said O'Brien. "I didn't realize that the Macedonians had an organization so much like ours."

"Yes," said the major, warming up to his subject. "It's remarkable to find that Alexander the Great and his father, Philip, before him, initiated organization and forms of tactics twenty-four centuries ago that are still in use today."

"How was the cavalry organized?" asked some one else.

"Why, very much like the organization of European cavalry today," explained the major. "Its regiment of five hundred men and horses was commanded by a colonel called a *hipparch;* this was subdivided into squadrons the designation of which escapes me at the moment, but these were again sub-divided into *ile* of sixty-four men each, commanded by an *iliarch,* who was a sort of cavalry lieutenant. Alexander's cavalry was divided into the heavy armed Companions and equally heavy armed Thessalians, and into two categories of lighter armed horse. Alexander was the first man to use field artillery and mountain artillery, for he carried his catapults on pack horses."

"Did he drill his troops as they do nowadays?" asked O'Brien.

"They were splendidly drilled." The major's voice rose. "They had the manual of the spear and the shield and the sword, and their foot work was as precise as the drill of a Prussian Guards battalion."

The younger officers were leaning forward, keenly interested. Only Bates sat back, a faint smile on his face.

His voice broke the silence at last.

"Well, old Alexander is a long time dead, and I don't suppose he ever had a gang of greasers to fight against like we have. Somebody ought to page him

and ask him how to break through that gang guarding the ford, and get us up into that town of Tres Hermanos and out again before the whole country boils up around us."

So saying, he rose and yawned.

There was something disparaging about his tone, a faint scorn which had the effect of shutting the major up like a clam, his enthusiasm quickly dissipated. Mumbling a good night, the little field officer walked toward his tent and his blankets, leaving the rest of them sitting about the fire.

"The major certainly knows his onions anyway," commented O'Brien.

"Yes, he knows about onions twenty-four centuries old," jibed Captain Bates. "That isn't going to do us much good if he can't haul us out of this mess we're in now. Believe me, I don't like the way the men are muttering."

For the first time the other officers noted that the camp was strangely silent. There was no sign of the general, light hearted buzz and clamor of talk and laughter that marks a camp of negro soldiers. The men were gathered in little groups, squatting along the troop street, speaking, when they spoke at all, in low tones.

THE major was up two or three times during the night, making the rounds of the outguards. He noted the glare of camp-fires far out on the mesa surrounding the American camp on all sides. He stared at these a long time and finally went back to his tent, saying nothing. But had anybody seen his eyes he would have noted the worry in them. No one, however, noticed or remarked upon the strained and thoughtful mien of the squadron commander.

The squadron was astir early and the whole place full of activity, with cook-fires burning and horses being led to water. The major had his map case out and was studying the general staff map of the terrain ahead while his horse was being saddled. With his finger he traced along the trail they were following until he came to that mountain stream which was marked "unfordable" except at one place. That place lay along the trail he was to follow. The trail led through the ford and up on the far side, past a hill which dominated the passage and out into a plain that stretched for a thousand yards to where the town of Tres Hermanos lay.

It was not a good place into which to venture, for the hills rose high around the edge of the plain and the unfordable river flanked it on the left, leaving no way of retreat open except by the ford. And the key to the ford was the hill which dominated it. The major shook his head as he rose and buckled up his map case. But orders were orders, and his face was cast into resolute lines as he climbed into his saddle.

The squadron moved out, the sun glinting on the silvered tips of the guidon staffs and sparkling from the scarlet and white banneret at the head of each troop.

"Shall I go ahead, sir, with my troop and try to force that ford?" asked Bates, drawing his horse up beside the major.

"Yes, and mind you hold that hill on the far side to secure our retreat if it should become necessary."

Bates nodded in a half tolerant, half amused fashion as he returned to his troop. In another minute he was on his way and disappeared from view ahead in a cloud of dust.

The bands of Mexicans, which had kept the American command under surveillance all night, were astir early and paralleled the march of the squadron on both flanks, and preceded the swifter advance of Bates' troop.

The major expected trouble near the ford, and rode forward, keyed up and listening with strained attention for any sound from the front; but the sun rose higher and the heat grew more intense, and all was silence ahead. In about an hour and a half the leading units of the squadron were in sight of the ford and could see the glint of water underneath

the cottonwood trees that fringed the banks of this tempestuous mountain stream.

Far ahead the scouts signaled back "all clear", and, as far as the major could see, the Mexican groups which had been moving along the flanks had disappeared from view. But the "all clear" signal came from the far side of the ford, where, through his glasses, he saw several men and horses of Bates' troop on the hill which dominated the ford. Some instinct told the major that this was almost too easy, but he put it down to excess nervousness and gave the command to move forward.

Moving slowly through the ford, he gave his horses time for water and had opportunity to see that the maps he used were correct, for the stream came pouring down the narrow gorge from above and dropped again into a narrow gorge below. So swift and deep was the stream above and below the ford that nothing save a bird could have crossed it.

The horses drank deep of the cold mountain water and there were the usual yells as some among them, disregarding rider and equipment, tried to roll in the clear stream. But wave after wave of horsemen rode up the bank until at last three troops were on the far side and advancing out into the plain. It was here that the major sent a messenger up to the hill telling Captain Bates to remain and hold that point as a safeguard for a possible retreat.

The head of the first troop had scarcely emerged into the plain, and the major was studying the low lying adobe houses of the town on the far side, when he noticed dust and the glint of steel in the hills to his right. Taking out his field glasses, he stiffened in the saddle as he saw a large group of mounted Mexicans leap into his field of vision. They were riding slowly down a small canyon toward the plain.

Swinging his glasses along the base of the hill, he found another and still another group until the hill seemed alive with horsemen. The squadron was well out on the plain now, moving toward the town.

Suddenly there broke on his ears the sharp crack of rifle fire and upon his startled gaze there came bursting out of the town some fifty or sixty negro troopers, riding low in their saddles, with Bates leading their precipitate retreat.

A scattering volley of shots followed the fleeing soldiers, but the major was paying no heed to them. A sudden fear clutched at his heart as he thought of that key point in his rear, that hill which dominated the ford.

Scarcely had he turned in his saddle, when he heard firing from that hilltop; and down its side, galloping in reckless fashion, came a handful of troopers. As he watched, he saw a large group of Mexicans appear on the top of the hill.

So quickly did things happen, that Bates and his disorganized troop were boiling around him at the front of the squadron at the same time that the group from the hill in rear galloped in the tail of the column.

Bates had failed to obey his orders and the squadron was caught in a trap. He had hardly turned to Bates to demand an explanation when Sergeant Carter rode up from the rear, his eyes rolling, and pulled his horse to its haunches as he saluted. He spoke excitedly:

"Suh, Majah! Theah's all of foah, five hundred Mexicans across the ford an' up that hill!"

Bates was trying to say something, but the major silenced him. The squadron had come to a halt without command and the negro troopers were craning their necks in all directions, watching the encircling bands of Mexicans flooding down from the hills and surging up from the rear.

The only way open seemed to be forward, toward the town. But as the major peered toward its adobe buildings, he saw another group of horsemen come trotting out from behind the houses and halt forbiddingly on the edge of the town.

IT WAS a nasty situation. To the left the ground sloped down to the steep edge of the canyon, below which foamed the unfordable portion of the stream. There was very little shelter in sight save a depression on the left, which might possibly protect the horses. But it involved backing the squadron up against the river bank, a bad maneuver at best. All means of retreat were cut off, however. A rifle barked in the town and a bullet pinged in the dust nearby. It was this that made up the major's mind for him.

Signaling the command to gallop, he led the squadron into the depression on his left and gave the signal to fight on foot. There were two or three dry arroyos in which shelter for the horses could be had and, as he flung his dismounted men up to the edge of the knoll, he gave orders for the concealment of the led horses.

With the horses under shelter, he scrambled up on foot to the nearest troop, finding the men sprawled along below the crest, rifles in readiness.

A quick survey through his field glasses only succeeded in impressing upon him more strongly the exceeding gravity of the situation. The Mexican forces that had followed them from the last halt were now appearing in full strength upon and around the base of the hill which dominated the ford. There were several hundred Mexicans in the vicinity of the town. These seemed to be better organized forces, for they were lined up in some sort of order. The horsemen, still streaming down from the hills, amounted to at least five hundred or more. The major estimated that there were close upon two thousand Mexicans in view, with more appearing every minute.

So far only a single shot had been fired, and he tried to take heart from this. But there was little hope in sight, for, with that great preponderance of force against him and his only exit bottled up, he was caught fast in a trap.

The men were silent and tense, expecting at every moment to have to fight off the attack of that great force of Mexicans. Again the major swept his field glasses around the edges of the plain, moving from the town across the face of the hills and back to the trail that led to the ford. This second view disclosed even more of the enemy, for now there were nearer three thousand in view. And still they continued to arrive.

But minute after minute passed, and the Mexicans maintained their distance. Finally an hour had gone, and the soldiers began to relax somewhat from their strained attitude of waiting. At last the major decided to form camp and unsaddle, and get what rest he could for his men. Leaving guard detachments on duty, the rest of the men were quietly withdrawn and set to making camp.

There was a good deal of movement between the various Mexican forces, but they seemed to be halted in place as far as any forward motion was concerned. Noon came, and with it the cooking fires of the Mexicans began to send aloft their smoke, and the enemy broke ranks and ate the noon meal. The major was puzzled somewhat at their inactivity. The large force of Mexicans seemed to be waiting for something. What it was he could not imagine, unless they were postponing operations until the arrival of greater forces.

The question of water began to make itself felt. A narrow goat track was discovered leading down to the bed of the stream, but it was so precipitous that water could be brought up only with great difficulty, and in small quantities. This could supply the wants of the men, but the question of water for the horses was going to be a problem before very long.

There was something about this situation of a beleaguered force and this peculiar combination of ford and plain and town that struck a vague chord of memory in the major's mind. It seemed to him that he had, in his readings of military history, studied a similar situ-

ation in which some ancient force had been involved.

The afternoon wore through with the Mexicans still remaining in place. As night came on, the squadron guards were strengthened and orders issued for assembly in case of attack. A meager supper was served. To add to the difficulties, the low supply of food was making itself felt.

Ammunition was another worry. The men carried only what they had in their belts and one reserve bandoleer apiece, an amount of rifle ammunition that would scarcely last one hour of severe fighting. Contemplating this situation, the major thought ruefully of that machine gun platoon he had begged for and which had been refused him.

There was little conversation around the fire that night, and the men in their bivouacs were glum and sullen. Again the major sensed that hostility of the troopers toward him, only now it seemed intensified and more dangerous. Plainly, these negro soldiers held him responsible for the dangerous situation in which they found themselves. Knowing negro troops by reputation, the major was well aware of what strong potentialities they have for heroic combat, coupled with an equally strong tendency toward wild and unreasoning panic, if matters do not go to suit them. It was this latter he feared, and dreaded putting them to the test lest they break under him.

Captain Joe Bates, not having received the reprimand which he merited, had begun to justify himself in his own mind for his disobedience of orders until at last he had recovered his aplomb, and returned to his old policy of criticizing his squadron commander.

"Why in blazes doesn't he do something?" he growled to the others. "My God, just to sit here and wait to be hit is not going to get us anywhere. The longer we wait, the stronger the Mexicans grow."

The others nodded in silent agreement with him. Emboldened by their support, he grew louder in his criticism.

"If he doesn't do something pretty soon," threatened Bates, "we'd be justified in forcing him to make some move. I tell you, the man is incapable He's in a blue funk and doesn't know which way to turn!"

There was an element of truth in Bates' broad statement. The major was depressed, and strove to find a way out that would not result in the loss of too many lives. At the moment he was out with the farthest outguard, watching that encircling line of camp-fires that marked the Mexican position. Again that vague memory, of having read of some such dilemma affecting some ancient commander, returned to plague him. As he turned away from the outguard to retrace his steps, he collided with some one in the dark. The man's murmured apologies came in the voice of the Greek Medical Corps man with whom he had spoken the night before. It was Sosthenes Pangoulos who begged his pardon.

SOSTHENES PANGOULOS, the Macedonian! Suddenly the major stood stockstill as the lightning flash of memory showed him the thing he had been seeking. It came back to him in a flash, that story of one of Alexander's first battles. Pelium was the name of that town, that mountain outpost against the Illyrians, whose possession by the barbarians meant the opening of the flood gates of savage warriors descending upon the Macedonian plain. It was Clitus, the Illyrian, who had seized the town and whom Alexander attacked; and then came Glaucias with thousands more of the barbarians and boxed Alexander up between plain and river—just as this squadron was boxed up tonight.

But the quick glow of joy at remembering the locale was succeeded by an even heavier depression as his memory failed to recall the further details of that fight. Strive as he might, the major could not remember how Alexander, sore beset as he was, with his re-

treat cut off and his men in danger of starvation, had managed to withdraw so skillfully as to lose scarcely a single man or horse.

He strode back to the fire, still sunk in a brown study; he did not note that the officers ceased talking at his approach. Wrapped in his thought, he sat there gazing silently into the fire, and was only roused by a message from the outguards. Lieutenant O'Brien, the officer of the guard, brought in word that a new outfit of Mexicans had arrived, that new camp-fires had sprung up and that the Mexican force was strengthened by at least a thousand more men.

That would be Glaucias coming with reenforcements, reflected the major, and he frowned in an effort to remember how Alexander had extricated himself from the mess.

Toward midnight O'Brien came again, this time with one of his men, a negro who spoke Spanish. This man had been sent out as a scout and had crawled up near the Mexican camp by the town. From the news he brought back, it was patent that an attack against the American force was planned for the next morning. This news only confirmed the major in what he had already reasoned. His striker brought him a blanket and he wrapped himself in it and leaned back against the saddle, his brain still working at that mystery of how Alexander solved his problem. He found himself suddenly sleepy and weary and closed his eyes for a space.

It seemed to him that he had scarcely closed them before he was awakened in the gray dawn, nor was he surprised to find the Greek Medical Corps man standing over him. He noted without any particular emotion that Sosthenes Pangoulos had doffed his khaki uniform and was arrayed in unusual garb. On his head the Greek wore a large helmet with a great crest reared about it, and upon his body a close fitting coat of leather upon which was sewed many small triangular plates of iron. His legs were encased in strange looking leggings, made of metal, and his feet were in sandals. Strangest of all was the weapon that the Greek carried, a great, slender pole some twenty feet in length.

As the major rose to his feet he heard an immense stirring and movement around him in the mist. There was much clanking and tinkling of metal, the neighing of horses and strange guttural commands. A hoarse toned trumpet blared forth nearby and the major heard the rush of men hurrying into ranks.

The man above him was impatient to be gone. The major rubbed his eyes as he noted that the slender pole which the Greek carried was an unusually long spear, weighted heavily at the butt. It was a *sarrisa,* that he knew immediately, the extraordinary long spear of the Macedonian *hoplite.* At his side the Greek carried a short stabbing sword, and slung over his left shoulder he bore a great shield, an elliptical shaped affair made of heavy leather and brass, with an eagle outspread on its curving surface.

The major accepted all this calmly as the Greek turned away. He noted that the heavily armed *hoplite* dropped his great spear from the perpendicular, grasping it some five feet from the weighted butt, for greater ease in carrying, and turned about, hurrying toward a host of men half seen in the morning mist.

Out of the mist came the sharp, short sounds of commands and the barking notes of men answering the roll call, the breathing silence that succeeds it as soldiers stand at attention and ranks lock into place.

The mist formed and dissolved, now concealing, now disclosing bodies of cavalry drawn up, their brass armor gleaming faintly; clumps of footmen being marshaled into larger and heavier units and everywhere that forest of extraordinary long spears.

All about him there was the immense business-like stir that marks the breaking of camp for disciplined troops. As the morning mists dissipated under the

first rays of the sun, the major stared out across the plain to the hills and saw them bristling with skin-clad barbarians, equipped with wicker shields and clumsy bows and lances. The scene was the same and yet not the same, for the town had grown walls and towers since last he had seen it.

He had little time to reflect on this, for the camp was emptying itself of solid clumps of ironclad men which were forming up into an immense brigade, which began gradually to extend along the front of the camp until at last it stood in locked ranks, covering nearly three-fifths of a mile from wing to wing.

It seemed a solid wall of glittering steel as it sood there, sixteen files deep, its long spears reared overhead like a forest, the rays of the rising sun twinkling on their sharp points.

Now a murmur went up from the phalanx and the brisk barking of a command, and suddenly the wall of great shields rose in one motion to the height of the men's shoulders, and then were dropped back again to rest on the ground. And the major knew that he was looking upon the massed salute of the phalanx. Gazing along its front, he saw riding around the right flank a body of glittering horsemen, the sun striking golden fire from their arms and armor as they came on, riding in column of *iles,* each *ile* with a front of sixteen horsemen and a depth of four.

Riding at the head of this proud array was a man on a black charger, wearing white plumes in his helmet and richly gilded armor.

SUDDENLY a gilded standard was raised, trumpets blared all along the line, and slowly and ponderously, like some great machine, the phalanx rolled over the ground toward the center of the plain.

There was much agitation among the skin-clad barbarians and they came swarming down from their hills and commenced to edge out into the plain, not daring to come too near as yet.

Meanwhile the great phalanx swept over the ground until it reached the center of the plain. Here it halted with another blare of trumpets.

For a second all was silent, the barbarians themselves amazed at the quiet strength of this steel-clad host. Then a signal blared from somewhere and, with one motion, all the great spears, the twenty-foot *sarissa* of the first five ranks, swept down gracefully and were leveled at the enemy. Behind them the remaining eleven ranks of spears were lowered over the shoulders of the man in front so that the front and top of the phalanx bristled like a hedgehog.

And then the phalanx swung from line into column. A trumpet blared and the phalanx shifted its formation, forming the *embolon* — the wedge — pointed threateningly at the barbarian masses. Again it shifted with a stamp and clang, this time forming the *koiembolon,* or pincers, and threatened the barbarians in a new direction.

Through all this bewildering shift of front and flank, of complicated wheel and turn, the phalanx was gradually nearing the barbarians.

What happened then was almost too quick for the major to follow, for there arose a great clangor of shields and the deep throated battle cry of the Macedonians—and the major found himself slumped against his saddle, staring up at O'Brien leaning above him. So real had been his dream that the major could even now hear the echo of the deep lunged Macedonian battle cry, accompanied by the crash of four thousand spears beaten against four thousand shields.

O'Brien's lips were moving and words were coming, but it took the major a full moment to realize the import of what he was saying.

"I thought I should wake you up, sir. It's getting toward daylight and the Mexicans are beginning to stir."

"Surely, surely," mumbled the major, rising to his feet and rubbing the sleep

out of his eyes.

For the first time he noticed in the pale light of dawn that his officers were grouped near him, with Captain Bates at their head. Bates cleared his throat and advanced a step toward the squadron commander.

"Major, we've been worried about what you're going to do to get us out of this mess—"

Suddenly the major was all alert.

"Yes," he answered, "I should think you would worry, Captain Bates, seeing it was your disobedience of my orders that got us into this mess. But now is no time to worry. To horse, gentlemen! To horse!"

There was the ring of authority in the major's voice. Somehow he seemed taller and more commanding.

As the first rays of the rising sun dispelled the morning mist, the squadron came welling out of that depression and over the knoll like a wave. Loud yells went up from the Mexicans along the base of the hills, at the edge of town and down by the hill that guarded the ford. There was intense activity. But this activity ceased on a sudden, as the startled Mexicans saw that squadron flow out into the plain, standard whipping the breeze and silken guidons glowing in the sunlight.

The Mexicans grew more silent as the squadron swung into column and galloped toward the town. As it neared the outskirts of the place there was a rush of horsemen down from the hills. But as swiftly as the squadron moved toward the houses, it swung away again and formed in line once more. There arose a metallic whir as four hundred sabers leaped from the scabbards and a glittering wall of steel arose above the squadron, falling as the line of horsemen swept thunderingly forward toward the forces at the base of the nearest hill. These gave back as that steel tipped line galloped toward them.

Again the squadron shifted and turned and went through a bewildering series of drill movements, now galloping into column of platoons, now forming line at the left and again extending in a long line of foragers. So interested did the Mexicans become in this brilliant display of perfect drill that none of them noted that the squadron edged imperceptibly down the plain toward that hill which guarded the ford.

When still some two hundred yards from the hill, there followed a brilliant series of drill movements swiftly executed at the gallop.

And then before the startled Mexicans realized what was happening, one troop detached itself and swept up that hill with the bare steel gleaming in its front and drove the men that held it.

Simultaneously the other three troops swung into column and galloped down the trail, past the hill, toward the ford.

There were few scattering shots and a concerted rush toward the point where the squadron disappeared, but it was too late. Even now the rearmost troop was on the far side and Captain Bates, from the hillside above, was galloping down and splashing across the ford.

* * *

"Boy, de majah shuah hauled us out of that theah ruction by the slack of ouah pants! How come he done figger out how to fool them greasahs thataway?" Corporal Sam Lee inquired.

Sergeant Carter turned from the saddle he was cleaning.

"Ah heah him tell Captain Bates he didn't figger it out nohow. He done told the captain dat somebody—Ah disremember the name—done figgered it out twenty-foah centuries ago, an' the majah reads about it in a book."

Silence from Corporal Lee. And then—

"What else the majah done say to Captain Bates?" he asked curiously.

"*Dat* Ah dunno—but whatever he say, Captain Bates he singin' mighty small dese days. Yeah, he sawin' wood an' sayin' nothin'—'ceptin' he up an' tell Lootenant O'Brien he goin' to buy some books soon as he git back to garrison!"

A Story of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police

TREED TREASURE

By ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON

A GRIN of sly satisfaction overspread the bearded face of Ace Sontner.

He was squatting in front of a rude log cabin and gazing upward at a treetop. A legion of trees, all aspens and as alike as sisters, encircled this retreat of his. High in the top of one of them, cached in a knothole, was a chamois bag containing sixteen matched diamonds. They were worth a hundred thousand dollars and the neck of Ace Sontner.

Climbing that high tree had been inspired, no doubt, by Sontner's earlier training. In his younger days he had worked as a highrigger among lumbermen of the far Northwest. Although of late years he had been living by his wits and guns in Montreal, he had not forgotten how to climb.

"Couldn't have picked a better place to hole up in," exulted Sontner now. "What if this Constable Borke, or Cork, or whatever they call him, does find me! Let him come. What can he prove?"

For a month Sontner had been holing up here in what, judging by a spoiled fur or two and a few broken traps, was evidently a shack once used by some trapper. A week ago Sontner had trekked to Lake Montebello Landing for supplies. There he had heard that a certain Constable Cork, of the R.C.M.P, had

been assigned to track him down.

Or rather that Constable Cork had been detailed to bring in an unknown Montreal thief and murderer. The guilt, Sontner knew, could be established only by finding him in possession of the loot. Therefore he was standing pat; it was up to the Mounted . . .

Sontner slouched into the cabin. There he fried some bacon and brewed black tea. After awhile he returned to the sunlight. The balminess of the great, silent outdoors soothed him. The aspens whispered as the breeze freshened; from a ridge beyond them came the tang of spruce. He lit a cigaret, stretched his arms lazily and was content.

"Excep' fer them damn mosquitos," he amended later, as a gray cloud droned out of the woods and hovered near his door.

He picked up an old discarded snowshoe left by some earlier tenant. Over the web of this Sontner had plastered a cloth and he now used it to bat away mosquitos.

He was so occupied, when he saw a horseman hardly fifty feet from the cabin. Sontner instinctively jumped a yard to the right. His arm crooked tensely, the fingers clawed, the hand hovering close to a gun weighted side pocket.

The horseman needed no other card of introduction than his outfit: bright red blouse, brass buttons, shoulder-strapped army belt, broad, stiff Stetson and holstered automatic. The blouse had a tight fitting collar; and even at fifty feet Sontner could see the insignia of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

The left eye of the rider was closed against the sun and his right was squinting a challenge at Sontner. His lips were grim and resolute. Nor was he any stripling; he was, Sontner decided, one of the tougher, rougher veterans of the service. His features, though burned by wind and sun to match the color of his coat, were hard and cold. His challenging squint declared war on the fugitive before even a word was spoken.

"Who are you?" demanded Sontner.

The intruder sat his saddle, silently appraising Sontner. Sontner, in turn, appraised the intruder. Something in the set of those stern features worried him, even frightened him. Could the man be bought off? Sontner had never heard of any fugitive who had succeeded in buying off a Mountie.

"My name," said this one, "is Cork. Cork of the R.C.M.P. Rank, constable. You're Ace Sontner, I take it."

"If it's any of your business, yes," came surlily from Sontner. His arm was still crooked, the hook of his hand close to the right side pocket of his coat.

"In that case," he was told, "I'm here to take you and 'steen man-size diamonds down to the king's court."

"What the hell would I know 'bout any diamonds?" came sullenly from Sontner.

The challenger pulled the brim of his hat a trifle forward in order to shade his left eye from the sun. He opened that eye now and his gaze seemed to bore through Sontner.

"You got 'em all right, all right," he decreed in a cocksure tone.

His confidence frightened Sontner more than ever. What did this fellow know? Could he have learned the secret of that treetop cache? If so, it meant conviction and the scaffold for Sontner.

With the thought, Sontner made a go for his gun. The .45 was half clawed from his pocket when the redcoat fired. He beat Sontner's draw by a breath. Sontner heard a roar from the saddle and then it seemed as if some one had struck the back of his hand with a sledge. It was numb. His own weapon lay on the ground.

He looked dazedly at his hand and saw no wound or scratch.

"Just bull luck for you and punk shootin' for me," he heard the redcoat saying. "Aimed at your top shirt button and missed it a foot. Must've hit your gun."

With a quick swing of his leg he dismounted. He came to Sontner with an easy, careless stride, holstering his

weapon as he came.

"Better not try any more monkey business with Ben Cork," he warned. "H'ist 'em. That's right." He clicked handcuffs on Sontner's upraised wrists.

He picked up Sontner's .45. Then he prodded Sontner into the shack and searched him for the diamonds.

He stripped the fugitive to the skin and went over every thread and thong of his garments. Sontner was astonished at the searcher's minute attention to detail.

At the same time he was relieved. For this proved that the Mountie did not know of the treetop cache. If so, he would be climbing a tree instead of searching Sontner. The gunplay, then, had been a mistake.

The redcoat did not seem to resent it. He did not refer to it again. Instead, he removed the handcuffs and allowed Sontner to dress. Then he linked one cuff to a bunk post and the other to Sontner's right wrist. After making sure that no weapon or missile was within Sontner's reach, he began searching the cabin.

Again Sontner was amazed at the man's thoroughness. He watched the tearing up of his floor; he saw every atom of mud poked out from the chinks of his log walls. He saw every square inch of walls and ceiling sounded. He saw the gasoline poured from his lamp, his lard can explored, his duffle bag ransacked from end to end, the wadding sifted from his mattress.

ALL AFTERNOON the redcoat kept grimly to the search. He barely spoke to Sontner. More and more Sontner fidgeted. If the man searched the cabin this thoroughly, he might even sift every leaf and tree of the forest.

The consoling thought for Sontner was that his captor, thus far, could have no real proof of the Montreal crime. He'd catch up with no proof until he uncovered the loot.

Sitting there with one wrist cuffed to a bunk post, Sontner reviewed the circumstances under which he had become possessed of sixteen diamonds. He had lifted them from the throat of an English peeress, en route to her hotel from a Montreal theater. Standing on the running board of her limousine, he had forced the cockney chauffeur to drive a mile out of town, halting him on a dark road.

Once there, Sontner, himself masked, had forced both to disembark. The lady had fainted by the roadside. The chauffeur had resisted and was shot through the heart. After snatching a platinum chain on which were strung sixteen large diamonds, Sontner had entered the limousine and driven away northwesterly.

All night he had driven at a furious clip, cracking up finally in a ditch. He had taken to the woods afoot, leaving a trail only until he reached the first river. Stripping the gems from the platinum chain, he had thrown the chain in the river. Thereafter he had traveled far, leaving no trail which could connect him to the wrecked car. How could they tie any guilt to him then, unless they caught him with the loot?

At sundown the redcoat was still grimly, doggedly, unhurriedly searching. At length he secured Sontner's second wrist to the bunk and went out to attend to his horse. He was gone an hour. He came in with saddle and bridle, tossing them on the cabin floor.

He made a fire; after making selections from Sontner's grub box, he cooked supper. He ate alone, absorbedly, quite ignoring Sontner.

"What about me?" whined Sontner.

The redcoat's only answer was to release the captive's left wrist and to set by him half a loaf of bread and a can of water.

"That'll be your ration," he said, "until you show me the cache."

The lips of Sontner drooped sneeringly. So that was the game! Bread and water until he exposed the diamonds!

"The fool! Doesn't he know that a

guy'd rather starve than hang, any day in the week?" thought Sontner.

The lips of the captive straightened to a grim resolve. All the king's horses and all the king's men, much less this one Mounted cop, would never draw the truth from Sontner.

After supping on bread and water, Sontner stretched himself on the bunk and slept.

The sizzling of bacon awakened him. He smelled coffee. Wristbound, Sontner sat on the side of the bunk and watched the redcoat partake of a handsome breakfast. For Sontner there was bread and water—no more.

Again the captive's lips drooped in scorn. He said:

"Yer game ain't worth shucks, Constable. I'm either guilty or I ain't guilty. If I'm guilty, I'd rather starve than hang. If I ain't guilty, you'll hang yerself if you starve me."

Yet by noon Sontner felt himself weakening. There was a cloud of mosquitos swarming in the cabin and he had only one hand with which to beat them away. The door stood invitingly open. More mosquitos entered to torment him.

He could hear the redcoat outside, sounding the earth here and there with a spade. Only once during the forenoon had the man spoken.

"Time's nothing to me," he told Sontner. "You can show me the cache now, next month or next Winter. I'm in no hurry."

By noon Sontner was weakening and in a temper.

"Say, Constable," he snarled, "you either got a warrant for me or you ain't. If you ain't, turn me loose. If you got one, take me to court."

The captor produced an official paper from the inside pocket of his crimson blouse. He handed it to Sontner, saying—

"Here's my warrant; read it."

He opened a can of juicy peaches and ate them while Sontner read the accusing note:

Constable Cork:

Ace Sontner disappeared from Montreal the same night the Burnsberry chauffeur was shot. Sontner, we learn, was spawned by the North Woods, is as much at home there as a duck in water.

He was clean shaven that night of the stickup. Three days later he was seen at Carmony's Post with about a three-day growth of beard. Four days later he was seen at Lake Montebello Landing with about a week's growth of beard. That means he traveled fast northwest on a bee line from the wrecked car. Your job, Cork. Bring in Sontner and the sixteen diamonds.

—WEATHERBEE, CAPT. R.C.M.P.

"Well, then," Sontner challenged sullenly, "why'n't you take me in?"

"The order," his captor reminded him, "calls for you and sixteen diamonds." He lighted his pipe, turned his back on Sontner and smoked thoughtfully.

From some distant lake came the mocking cry of a loon.

The mosquitos, evading the redcoat's smoke screen, came buzzing about Sontner. Sontner batted desperately with his free hand.

"What steered you to this shack?" he inquired finally.

"Trapper named Jules Joliette," he was told. "Jules built this shack, trapped out the region and moved over the ridge. I called on Jules. He steered me here—told me a man of your description was holing up at his last year's camp."

The redcoat secured Sontner's second wrist to the bunk and went out. Again he was gone an hour, possibly to change the picketing of his horse. By the time he returned, mosquitos had nearly blinded Sontner.

Sontner squirmed there on the bunk, sweating, cursing. He even cursed his captor while the latter was freeing his left wrist.

The redcoat went outside immediately and began prodding again with a spade. Sontner sat on the bunk and listened with an increasing dread to the man's persistent tappings. The fellow had the patience of a devil! What if, after prospecting all the ground, he

should start climbing trees?

All afternoon Sontner listened to those tappings as they moved nearer to, then farther from, the vital aspen. It was like the old child's game of "hide the thimble"; though in this case it was Sontner himself who turned first hot and then cold.

In the evening the redcoat came in with a dressed young squirrel. He fried it under Sontner's hungry gaze. Mocked and uncomfortable, Sontner was in a mood to murder Constable Cork; it was that temper, and nothing else, which inspired him suddenly with a bold scheme of escape.

He remembered that there was something else in the knothole, high in the tree, besides the loot. There was a .38 pistol. The redcoat had taken a .45 from Sontner; he knew nothing of a smaller weapon which the fugitive had cached with his loot.

It was the Montreal murder gun; with it Sontner had drilled the cockney chauffeur. He had retained it because he knew that a second gun might save his life in a fight. Yet, because it would fit a death bullet, he had cached it with the loot. The gun was loaded.

"It's got a bullet," thought Sontner with dark elation, "what's named for Constable Cork."

But he must not give in too soon. That would look suspicious to Cork. Cork must seem to wear him out. The bread and water must appear to starve, and the mosquitos must seem to torture, Sontner into submission.

THUS Sontner guilefully held out for another night and for half another morning. By then he was raving. His face was white and a mass of welts. He hardly needed to fake the agony in which he shrieked, finally:

"All right, damn you, I'm licked! Turn me loose and I'll get the diamonds."

"Now, next month or next Winter—it's all one to me," the redcoat answered.

Was his indifference sincere? Sontner thought he saw a spark of avarice replace the hardness of the redcoat's eyes.

"Say," whispered Sontner as the man came near to release the handcuffs, "how many of them sparklers you want to turn me loose?—You could turn me loose and claim you couldn't find me, see?"

The eyes hardened.

"Our outfit don't play the game that way, Sontner."

Sontner pretended to be utterly dispirited. A moment later the cuffs of steel fell from his wrists. He arose stiffly.

"Inside or out?" he was asked.

"Out."

"Step along, then. There's a third eye starin' at your back an' it's got a lead ball."

Sontner stepped out into the sunlight. There he paced back and forth for a few minutes in order to summon the normal circulation of his blood. Over him stood the redcoat with an ever ready gun.

Finally Sontner went to the rim of the clearing. He chose a certain aspen and began to climb. He reached the first fork, laboriously, like an awkward bear; from there he mounted rapidly from crotch to crotch.

He looked down. The redcoat was standing at the base of the tree, gun in hand, staring curiously up at him.

"Better not try any monkey business!" he warned.

Sontner reached a crotch more than forty feet from the ground. His hand found a knothole, his cache. The hand delved in. It felt the cold butt of a .38 pistol. Sontner squirmed a little higher and maneuvered so that his right coat pocket was near the hole. The bole of the tree and intervening lower limbs partially screened him from the watcher on the ground. Sontner twisted so that his own body helped further to screen his right hand.

With a deft movement he then plucked out the pistol and dropped it into his right coat pocket. He knew

that the man on the ground could not possibly have seen this transfer. Sontner now made a second transfer, this time conspicuously and with deliberation. He plucked from the knothole a chamois bag containing sixteen large matched diamonds. He hooked the string of the bag over his left wrist and began to descend the tree.

He looked down. His captor stood there at the base of the tree, the brim of his Stetson tilted back as he gazed upward. Again Sontner thought he saw an expression of avarice on those hard, windburned features. Was he, Sontner, overlooking a bet? Could the Mountie have been bribed?

It was too late now, for Sontner had already exposed his cache. Sontner's own features set resolutely; on them was writ the ruthless intent of murder as he slid down the bole to the ground.

He faced the redcoat. He stood toe to toe with him.

"Here they are," he said sullenly, extending the chamois bag in his left palm.

The redcoat reached for the bag, his cheeks flushed, his eyes eager. As he did so, Sontner's right hand stole into his right coat pocket. His finger crooked about a trigger. He fired through the lining of his coat. The trick worked; for the bullet smashed, with deadly precision, into the redcoat's chest.

SONTNER buried the corpse in a swamp; he spent the rest of the day camouflaging the grave and erasing every track between it and his cabin. He again climbed the aspen and restored the chamois bag to the cache. With it he put the twice guilty .38, which was still charged with four live shells.

The thing, decided Sontner, was to claim that Constable Cork had never been here at all. But what about the R.C.M.P. saddle in there on the cabin floor? What about an R.C.M.P. mount staked somewhere in the woods?

There were minor clues, too, which must be cleaned up. For instance, all evidence of dual occupation of the cabin. Yet right now Sontner must eat. He had been fifty-four hours on bread and water.

So, as the sun was setting, Sontner went in to prepare food. Eating, he worried. He wavered between two programs. One was to find, shoot and bury the horse, and in some manner to get rid of the saddle. The other scheme was to use the horse as a vehicle of speed to flee with the loot.

There were arguments for and against either plan. Flight would more than likely prove futile; certainly it would give color to his guilt. Sontner had already demonstrated that a fugitive can never flee quite far enough to get away from the Mounties. The scheme of sitting pat, on the other hand, seemed bold and foolhardy. Which should he choose?

As the sun set and the long Northern twilight enveloped the woods, Sontner brooded somberly over this dilemma. At the same time he ate ravenously and prodigiously of cooked food; then he sat there, full fed, staring at a saddle which bore the insignia of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

It would be no mean chore, he realized, to bury both the mount and the saddle. There was a third alternative. He might do nothing at all. Instead, on his next trip to the Landing he could ask, with affected innocence, if any one had seen a stray policeman. They would want to know why he asked. He could say that he had returned to his cabin after an absence to find a policeman's saddle, blanket and bridle left there. Evidently some wandering Mountie had made himself at home overnight. Of the man himself Sontner could claim to have seen nothing.

Men would suspect him. But what could they prove?

In any case Sontner was now armed. He had retrieved his own .45 from the redcoat. He brooded darkly over his schemes as he sat there staring at the saddle. Suddenly he was aware that

eyes other than his own were fixed on that saddle.

He whirled. Peering in at the cabin door stood as tough a looking woodsman as Sontner had ever seen. He was unwashed and unshaven. He wore a greasy leather jacket, a beaverskin cap and dirty denims tucked into brogans. He carried a big bore rifle whose barrel was directed at careless aim toward Sontner.

"Who are you?" gasped Sontner.

"Me—I'm Jules Joliette," spoke the intruder in the accent of a French Canadian woodsman. "I'm come look fer da poliss fella. Cork? You callum? Mebbeso poliss fella have hard luck? No?" The man's eyes fixed insinuatingly on the saddle.

Sontner nearly froze with fright. Here, he realized, was a dangerous witness. He recalled that Cork had stopped by to make inquiries of this Canuck, Jules Joliette. Here, therefore, was one who might prove a hard customer to deal with.

"Poliss man been here, dat one damn sure t'ing," stated the caller with conviction. His expression turned sly as he stood there squinting first at the saddle, then at Sontner.

"Yes, looks like he's been here," Sontner agreed sourly. "I been away myself. I came back and found his saddle. Must have a horse somewhere. Seen it?"

He was wondering if he dared risk trading bullets with this Canuck. He thought swiftly. More than likely, he reasoned, Cork had told the man why Sontner was wanted. For murder and sixteen diamonds. Did knowledge that a fortune in loot was involved explain the slyness with which Trapper Jules was confronting Sontner?

Had Jules come scouting along two days in the wake of Cork to see if there might be any pickings for himself, Jules Joliette? A likely enough theory, reasoned Sontner; for the man kept the barrel of his rifle aimed, with startling emphasis, at Sontner.

NEVERTHELESS, the expression on the intruder's features was more cunning than hostile. There was a crooked smirk on his lips. He leered at Sontner. His voice lowered a trifle as he said craftily:

"You got da seexteen diamonts? No? By gar, mebbeso you an' me we spleet dem seexteen diamonts."

"I know nothing about any diamonds," denied Sontner.

Yet in a measure he was relieved. He realized that he was dealing with his own kind. He realized, too, that there was no reason why this tough and unwashed woods rat, Jules, should care a hang about the fate of a Mountie. Jules was out for himself, the same as was Sontner.

More than likely Jules himself had old scores against the Mounted service. His game now, obviously, was to blackmail Sontner. For half the loot he'd keep his mouth shut. He'd never tell about the saddle, or that Constable Cork had inquired his way to this cabin.

"Mebbeso we make trade, no?" The woodsman grinned wickedly from the doorway. He kept the rifle pointed toward Sontner.

"I got nothin' to trade," sparred Sontner.

"Mebbeso you pretty good liar, no? Mebbeso you keel dat poliss fella, no?" The man entered the cabin and poked his rifle into the pit of Sontner's stomach. With his left hand he plucked the .45 from Sontner's pocket.

Then he backed out of the room. Sontner followed to the doorway. The man continued to back away, although he kept Sontner covered. He reached the edge of the clearing. Sontner shouted—

"Where you goin'?"

"Me go to Belle Landin'," said the other. "You no trade, me tell about poliss fella come here fer seexteen diamonts."

"Tell and be damned," exploded Sontner. Yet his face was afire with worry.

He followed placatingly and joined the other man at the edge of the clearing.

"Listen. I was just starting to the Landing to tell about that saddle myself. The Mountie left it here while I was gone. I ain't got the foggiest idea where he went."

"I t'ink mebbe you pretty damn good liar," countered the other. "You no trade, I go. You trade me half dem diamonts, by gar, I say nothin'. I say—"

The man stopped suddenly. His eye had caught something bright which glinted from the ground. He moved over a few paces to pick it up. Sontner saw with dismay that it was a used .38 shell.

It was a clue which Sonter, in his hunger and in his frantic hurry to dispose of the corpse, had forgotten. Given time, he would have picked it up. It was now too late. The woodsman had picked it up under the very aspen in whose top was cached evidence worth a hundred thousand dollars and the neck of Ace Sontner.

"By gar!" exulted the rifleman, staring at the cartridge shell and then turning to leer triumphantly at Sontner. "She no fit dis gun." He waved Sontner's .45. "Mebbeso she got other gun, no?"

Sontner despaired. He admitted that his case was all but hopeless. When the Canuck told at the Landing of Cork's inquiries, when he told of the saddle found here and displayed this lethal shell, he would be almost certain to weave a noose for Sontner.

And he was standing squarely under the tree which hid the vital secrets of two murders. The high leaves of that aspen now quivered, stirring with the breeze. Would they whisper those secrets to Trapper Jules Joliette?

At any instant Jules might be inspired to climb that tree!

A certain dark and bold inspiration repeated itself to Sontner. A trick had worked on Constable Cork. Why not try the same trick on Trapper Jules Joliette?

It was the only hope left and Sontner snatched it. He faked a grimace, then capitulated in a tone of despair.

"All right. You win. You keep your damned mouth shut and I'll give you eight of the stones."

Sontner brushed by him and, in the long, lingering afterglow of a Northern twilight, began climbing the aspen.

He shinned laboriously to the first crotch. Then he mounted agilely from crotch to crotch until he reached the cache.

Again, and with the gesture screened from below, he slyly slid the .38 into his right coat pocket. Again he conspicuously took out the chamois bag. From this he shook eight glittering gems into the palm of his left hand. He restored the bag to the knothole and began descending the tree.

An ague of apprehension gave speed to his descent. He had exposed the secret. The crook below could easily shoot him out of the tree, then ascend to secure *all* of the loot for himself.

Yet Sontner reached the ground safely. He stood toe to toe with the woodsman. He extended the eight diamonds.

The other man, to his amazement, made no move to take them. Instead he poked the muzzle of his rifle against Sontner's breast. His speech, when he spoke, contained a new note. It carried a ring of authority; gone from it was every vestige of backwoods patois.

"Sontner, keep them. Keep all of them. Keep the .38, too. I want the whole shebang in your pocket when we get to the Crown's court."

Sontner's knees weakened. His last hope fled. He stared in stark terror at the other, whose character had changed so magically. Here, if Sontner knew the breed, stood a dominant, foursquare Englishman.

"Constable Cork," the man was explaining, "has a bit o' hard luck. To make inquiries, he calls on Trapper Jules Joliette, who lives on the bank of a lake. Cork is travel weary, dusty; being an Englishman, he takes a bath.

He strips and dives into the lake. He swims to the middle and gets a cramp. He goes down once, twice, three times.

"Trapper Jules, watching from the cabin, thinks he drowned. But Cork's tough. He bobs up a fourth time in a patch of reeds, weak, but with his feet on a high bottom. He wades that high bottom to the far shore. There he is, exhausted, stark naked. Takes him a day and a night to get around that lake to the cabin of Jules Joliette.

"His clothes and horse are gone; so is Jules. Cork gets a fever and then chills; he lays up for two days, too sick to wash or shave. The only clothes there are old castoffs of Jules, the only gun is Jules' rifle. With these, finally, Cork carries on."

"You mean," cried Sontner, "that you're Constable Cork?"

The man smiled grimly.

"Aye. Your first guest was Trapper Jules Joliette."

Mister Emu

By WYMAN SIDNEY SMITH

A PUBLIC nuisance to the white settlers, a spirit bird to the black natives, and a curious, good natured fool when you meet him on a stock run, the Australian emu claims also the distinction of ranking next to the ostrich as the world's largest bird.

I saw my first emus in the yellowing light of a never-never sunset, when the trunks of the eucalyptus scrub were turning ghostly white and the red earth looked black; when the rabbits began coming from their burrows and the kangaroos poked along leisurely. Two emus came out of the scrub to look at my friend Martin and me and our automobile.

Next morning I asked Martin about getting a close-up photograph of one, and he smiled. I didn't know until later that he'd just gotten a promotion and had a wicked glint in his eye when we started off. We saw emus almost from the first; one that we tried to corner between two fences tricked us by ducking through the wires like a parrot.

Then we started one in a cattle run which was three miles wide and stretched from Queensland down to South Australia. Martin stepped on the gas and grinned. The speedometer was crowding fifty miles per hour and Martin was dodging holes, bushes, trees and rocks so fast he didn't see a ledge ahead. We went over, lurched, danced on two wheels, and finally landed right side up and still going. The black form of the emu was leaving a cornucopia of dust a mile ahead.

He zig-zagged; so did we. He dodged through tree clumps; so did we. Then he grew nervous when he saw us still on his trail and took a straightaway down the gravel track. We gained on him. Gravel stones flew out from his big toes, his small head bent forward, his beak stood wide open as though he were yelling murder.

Martin drove alongside the big bird, and I stood on the running board to make my picture. Got one—made another. Martin slowed down and Mr. Emu sailed off into the scrub, lagged, circled around to get a better look at us, and then stopped as though scratching his head.

"How fast were we going that last mile or so when I was taking pictures and you were holding the emu so close I could have touched his back?" I asked the question, gasping for breath.

"Between thirty-five and forty all the way," he said.

The emu still watched us from his covert. Maybe he *is* a fool, but he can run like two fools.

Continuing

FLENCHER'S ISLAND

By CAPTAIN DINGLE

PETER ROWLES, a young American scientist in the Fiji Islands, heard of the Island of Penrhyn, reported to be rich in strange plant life, and determined to go there. He was told that in all of Suva, Flencher Peruvio, master of the brigantine *Scorpion,* was the man most likely to offer him passage—but to think twice before accepting it.

Peter found Peruvio in a groggery, drinking with a flashy girl he called Flamette. And when Peter told the skipper he was a botanist, the man became intensely interested and readily agreed to ship him. He introduced the girl as another passenger on the trip; and told Peter they would sail on the morning tide.

As Peter started out of the place a hulking giant of a man brushed him roughly aside, bearing down on Peruvio and the girl.

"Yule!" Flamette screamed.

With startling fury the two men came together; then, like a dry stick, Yule's arm snapped in Peruvio's grip and he was lifted and hurled bodily over a balcony. Horrified, Peter was amazed at

the pleasant smile Peruvio turned upon him as he sat down again.

With considerale misgivings Peter went aboard the *Scorpion* that night, and when he awoke he found the ship under way. Going on deck, he was further disturbed to find that instead of Flamette as a fellow-passenger, Peruvio has shipped a pretty young woman he introduced as Gytha Crosbie. Flamette, whom Peter could still make out on the quay, stood shaking her fists at the fast receding ship. Yule, his arm in a sling, stood beside her.

Gytha Crosbie, too, soon perceived the air of mystery that brooded over the ship, and sought Peter out. She told him that her destination was Tahiti—long sea miles in the direction opposite to Penrhyn! Peter then was genuinely alarmed. Maxon, the mate, warned him against hasty action, but the American angrily ordered Peruvio to reveal his game. For answer the skipper locked him in the trade room—and smilingly began to struggle with a jigsaw puzzle.

Jovial Jinks, the steward, also warned Peter against the skipper when he brought him food. He told him that Naka, the black cook, had lost his tongue because he had talked out of turn; that one of the two Fiji boatmen who had brought Gytha Crosbie aboard and had been kidnaped, had been shot upon trying to get away. Jinks hinted at a treasure and a mysterious island for which they were headed.

Upon his release the next morning, Peter secretly tried to engage Tug Lammas, one of the sailors, in conversation; but the man's mouth was sealed beyond volunteering that Peruvio's first name—Flencher—meant "butcher of whales". Silence held the ship in its inviolable grip.

Peter was on deck when Peruvio and Maxon prepared to take the noon sight. The skipper stood at the rail with his sextant and, as Peter watched curiously, something passed his line of vision like a flash of light. It was a knife meant for Peruvio . . .

HE STOOD there with his sextant to his eye, unconscious of all but the afternoon sun. Would another knife come out of the unknown? Peter wanted to yell, but his throat was too dry. He glanced at the helmsman. Not a quiver. He glanced forward. Not a man in sight. Peruvio shouted—

"Stand by!"

Maxon repeated, "Stand by, sir!" through the skylight; then in a few seconds, "Time!" cried the skipper, and began reading off his angle.

Peter meant to tell him about that knife as soon as he had got his reading.

"Thirty—seventeen—twenty!"

Peruvio called the angle to the mate, to note down with the time, then, swiftly as that knife had flashed by his face, so flashed the man Peter thought ignorant of the attempt on his life. Sextant in hand, he was forward beside the boats in a breath, and Peter stood gaping at him. Straight to the Fijian's boat he went, and there was a fleeting gleam and a clink of chain within it. Then the Flencher raised his sextant and brought it down with one terrific chopping sweep, and the sound of the blow made Peter sick.

"Bring me a rag, Naka!" ordered Peruvio, and the smiling cook was beside him in a twinkling. Peruvio carefully cleaned his instrument and threw the rag at the cook.

"Chuck him to the fish," was all he said.

Then he returned aft, and met a white and awful Peter whose eyes saw the red fire in his and would not waver.

"Peruvio, I hope you're not mad! I devoutly hope so! I hope you are as sane as I am this moment," said Peter with terrible intensity. The girl had turned at the sound by the boat, but had seen nothing. She stared at Peter as if bewildered at his foolhardiness. "I hope I am wrong about you," Peter shrilled. "Because I mean to see you hanged for a murdering scoundrel!"

Flencher looked wide eyed for a moment, then laughed in Peter's face.

"Come aft, men!" yelled Peter in a frenzy. "Help me put this yellow hound in his place!"

Gytha looked terrified now. Maxon appeared, evincing little curiosity. The helmsman bent to his compass with redoubled intentness. And there stood Peter, bawling to the empty decks for the crew to rise and master the bully who rode them like a black dog. Not a man appeared. Only black Naka, smiling like noonday as he lifted the Fijian from the boat. Flencher suddenly relaxed. He had stiffened at Peter's daring words. Now he shook his head and stepped into the companionway, grinning.

"It's a brave little man, so it is! Peter, I'll make you a partner yet. Come, Gytha, and we'll do a bit of the puzzle when I've worked out the sight. Wasn't it lucky we didn't leave Peter a gun? Or was it yours? Oh, such language, Peter!"

CHAPTER VII

A DARK ANCHORAGE

IT WAS a whimsical, almost benign Flencher who refused in the days following to let Peter Rowles make a hero of himself. Flencher's pain had vanished, and he insisted that Gytha's nursing was responsible. He was so insistent that the girl became uneasy at his friendliness. She was almost afraid sometimes, for there was no mistake about his ardent feeling toward her.

She indulged him by playing with him at the puzzle whenever asked, and often when she raised her eyes from the dazzling pieces to rest for a moment she caught him gazing at her with such intensity that her hands turned cold. His eyes held a red devil in their somber depths; a look very like insanity. Yet she could not quite convince herself that he was mad. She was not entirely innocent in the ways of men, and it was inconceivable to her that this powerful, efficient crew of white men, and Maxon, would so docilely submit to sail under the control of a known madman.

She feared for Peter; and yet, as the days glided by in blue and golden tranquillity, Peter enjoyed every freedom and courtesy a passenger on such a ship could reasonably expect. Peter's outburst had apparently been forgotten. Flencher never mentioned it. But if she ever took a promenade on deck with Maxon, it was certain that very soon Flencher would appear on the scene and break up the couple with some palpably unnecessary order to the mate. Gytha resented that, for she rather liked Maxon, who took a tremendous lot of pains to fill her with deep sea lore much to her taste.

There were times when he went further in the way of hand grips and little familiarities of the sort than she liked; but he was very polite and never overstepped the ultimate mark she drew for him in that regard. Once she ventured to ask him exactly what was Flencher's idea in taking away her boatmen from Suva, and for a moment he seemed about to tell her. But Flencher appeared just then, and Maxon only had time to whisper, "I'll tell you later," when the skipper took her arm and drew her away.

Taking her forward, he left her by the boats and returned to speak to Maxon. What he said was not audible to anybody else, and he turned his back upon the mate immediately it was said; but Peter, perched aloft on the main crosstrees, looking down, saw Maxon's hands clench, saw him take a step after Flencher with every indication of fury, and saw him stop short as if held back by some invisible hand.

The mate glanced aloft, and Peter could see his livid face contorted with the throes of the swift conflict of desire and discretion. The Flencher, sitting beside the girl on the boat, looked as if no man need be afraid of him. Black Naka, smilingly scraping yams outside his galley door, might be the family cook of a quiet old manse instead of the

tongueless enigma of a mysterious crew.

"What does he talk about?" Peter demanded of the girl when he came from aloft and found her pensive and alone. She glanced up at his tone, and laughed softly.

"Pretty thick with him, I should say!" snapped Peter.

"I find him interesting," she said provokingly. "He's different." She gazed at the smooth blue water sliding past, and was silent for a moment, then remarked, "Sometimes he comes out with the strangest ideas, Peter. Really, I do believe he's insane, but it's a fascinating sort of insanity. When he's landed us, and we look back on this passage—"

"When!" growled Peter. "I don't believe you will ever look back on this passage!"

"What on earth do you mean? You said that queerly, Peter."

"It's a queer matter. I saw a little clash of wills between him and Maxon just now. You'd be surprised how your company is valued. I don't believe he ever meant to go to either Tahiti or Penrhyn. For my part, I'm going to get out of this damned death ship as soon as he makes that call he spoke about." Peter hesitated, then blurted out, "You'd better too—if he'll let you."

"Now who has strange ideas?" she chided him. "I said he had, but my word! They're not half as strange as yours. Do you mean to suggest that Captain Peruvio has designs on my liberty?"

"Yes, I do," returned Peter.

Gytha laughed derisively.

"There's romance for you! All my life I've longed for it. Now I'm to find it in a prosaic old Island trader, and all because a hard boiled skipper seems, in his crude way, to find companionship in my simple civility. Peter, you've been reading fiction."

"What about your boat, and those Fijians?" Peter countered stubbornly. Her face fell, and her eyes clouded.

"I was asking Mr. Maxon about that," she said thoughtfully.

"What did he say? I'll bet he daren't say a word about it."

"I think he wanted to, but—"

"*But!* I suppose you know why Naka is the only man aboard who laughs and looks as if he might talk freely?"

"Why? Has somebody been filling you up with tosh?"

"Tosh nothing!" Peter glanced hurriedly aft.

Flencher was rising through the after hatch, sextant in hand. Maxon dived below to the chronometer without waiting for the order. Peter lowered his voice and told her about Naka, just as he had heard it from Jinks. She looked horrified, troubled.

"Maxon won't tell you," stated Peter. "He knows better. But I'm going to ask Peruvio himself about that boat, and at supper, too. You see."

"You'll get locked up again," she warned him, trying to smile but only partly succeeding.

What Peter had told her disquieted her terribly. She had felt uneasy many times, but had forced herself to believe there was no cause. Peruvio was undoubtedly queer, but she disliked panics and panicky people; she preferred to believe that very soon now he would turn the *Scorpion's* head Tahitiward, and then all this mystery would soon be but a memory.

PETER put his question over the table as promised. He sat tensely in his chair when the words were uttered and his face went almost white. Gytha kept her eyes lowered, fearful in spite of her claims that she did not herself fear Peruvio. Then the Flencher laughed softly, and she looked up. There was no terror in that sound. The man was regarding Peter almost benevolently; but he filled his coffee cup with rum before he answered. She shivered at that; it meant that soon she would be called upon to nurse him again. But there was no smoldering red in his eyes as he replied to Peter's blunt question:

"What about stealing those Fijians and their boat, Captain? You'll have a job to explain that, won't you?"

The answer staggered both Peter and the girl, so coldly matter-of-fact was it.

"Oh, that? A little joke of mine, Peter. I feel sure Gytha will forgive me for that. You see, if those niggers had gone back to Suva and told people what ship Miss Crosbie was sailing in, some busybody might have raised a fuss. I haven't much of a name for passengers, I admit, and I wanted to take Gytha for a sail in my ship." He drank rum with relish, his eyes smiling at the girl across his cup rim. "I had seen her several times about Suva, and was tremendously attracted to her; but I didn't hope that she was looking for a passage out. When I found it was so, I decided my vessel would be more comfortable for her, and I bribed the only other skipper to refuse her."

"That's all very well," persisted Peter. "It's a piece of illegal trickery that'll get you into trouble yet. But there's worse than that. You shot that Fijian who jumped overboard! I know you did."

Now Peter must pay for his temerity, surely. Gytha got up from the table hastily. But Flencher was smiling, still without malice.

"The poor fellow was drowned, Peter, not shot. That's too bad, but can't be helped. The other one might have lived to a ripe old age in charge of my fisheries, if he hadn't tried to part my hair with a throwing knife. I strongly believe in the Bible, Peter. An eye for an eye, a haircut for a haircut—that's religion, my laddie. Isn't it, Gytha?"

"I am afraid I don't agree with you," said Gytha sharply.

Peruvio grinned and finished his rum.

"Disagreement's the soul of civilization," he remarked. "I have overheard you disagreeing with Peter about me. Oh, I have keen ears, and remarkable sight. But there you are. If you can't agree with me about the heavenly Bible, how the hell do you expect to agree with Peter about poor earthly me? I can show you letter and word for my religion, shall I?"

"Please don't," said Gytha, shortly. "It will be more to the point if you tell me when you expect to make this stop you spoke about. I shall miss that Tahiti steamer if any more time is wasted."

"Wasted? My dear girl, you pain me. I was just beginning to feel sure that you were rather enjoying the deviation from the prosaic." He got up, poured rum and swallowed it at a gulp, and moved toward his room.

"Please don't ask me to do puzzles," she called after him.

"I won't, tonight," he answered pleasantly. "Perhaps tomorrow. I'm going to be busy tonight."

The girl and Peter went on deck. It was a night of velvet blackness studded with stars that seemed almost to touch the mastheads. The vessel went through the smooth sea with a gentle whisper like the slipping of a sharp blade through satin. A breeze blew warmly on the quarter, thrusting the ship along at a speed far greater than the eye detected. Phosphorescence dappled the sea, and the dart of fish made frequent lines of fire athwart her course. Maxon and Peruvio were both on deck; the crews moved silently about near the boats, and the hatch was off the trade room. There was a lantern swinging there, and now and then a shadow moved scarcely less silently than the men.

A man aloft sent soft hails down in a voice of which each word was crystal clear; yet there was no sense of noise. Flencher answered when necessary, and without waste of word or wind. A spell held Gytha and Peter as silent as the rest. They felt something impending. They let their eyes rove, hoping to glimpse what others appeared to be able to see.

"Look! Is it a fire?" whispered Gytha, gripping Peter's arm and pointing almost ahead.

Peter fixed his gaze upon a patch of sea which seemed to be turning into red-gold. Then the lookout aloft called

softly down—

"Right in the eye o' the moon, sir!"

As he uttered the words, the red-gold turned to a glare, a blaze, and up shot the moon, a day past full, like a great gold plate rolling along the sea. And centered in it was a tiny tuft, all gilded by it, set there as if painted on the gold plate.

"It's an island!" breathed Peter.

"It's the one stop!" she whispered, and they silently gripped hands.

Flencher was wrong. Tomorrow they would be too busy to play puzzles.

MEN slackened sheets and checked the yards, and the vessel ran off a little from her course to bring the island on to a bearing. The moon soared, or seemed to, so fast did it rise, and there lay, right beneath it, a palm topped atoll which was nearer than it looked, so low was it. The lantern in the trade room was suddenly obscured; they were putting on the hatch, though leaving the light burning; men were moving the boats with tackles.

Peter felt a sort of exaltation in this ghostly approach to a tiny island out of the immensity of the blue sea. It was one of the eternal mysteries to him, how seamen found these specks of land; yet it was no mystery, as he should know, being educated to figures and such-like. Had he known it, such navigation was far simpler, attainable by far simpler men, than his own business of tracing soils and plants, bugs and birds, making something grow where nothing grew before. But it had never occurred to him. He meant to ask about it.

"Does it seem to you a bit queer, coming upon an island in the night like this, Peter? All ghostly and secret?" Gytha murmured in his ear. He felt her shiver.

"Mysterious," he replied. "But I rather like it, don't you? So different from the helter-skelter, knock the dock down steamer fashion. Look at that! It's a whale! Isn't that a whale that I see over there, Captain?"

A mass of flame burst from the sea close by, and a tremendous splash sent an acre of foam abroad in a hissing overfall. Peruvio didn't answer, but presently he came to them; and though he spoke softly, there was a harsh twang in his voice which warned them that this was no benevolent Peruvio of supper time.

"I want you both below," he said, and took an arm of each, turning them toward the companionway.

In the saloon he pushed Gytha toward her own berth.

"Stay in there until I tell you to come out," he said. Peter, he shoved toward the trade room. "You stay there. It'll be unhealthy on deck when the dew falls," he remarked with a grim chuckle.

Before Peter could gather his wits to resist, he found himself once more surveying the trade room stock, under the swinging lantern. He could hear Gytha protesting. Peruvio answered her with savage voice, and he heard her door slam and Peruvio's steps mounting to the deck again.

Hours dragged by. Peter heard every sound of the ship coming to anchor. He heard quiet voices calling directions; the flutter of sails; the chirruping of gear. Then the rattling jar of the cable as the anchor went down, and of a sudden the sounds lost their extreme cautiousness. He knew when the boats were hoisted and launched; there were pattering feet close above his head; then the muffled thump of oars, dwindling into distance.

He dozed, and the rats and roaches bothered him less because of the light. Once he fell from his seat, and sat up to listen. Nothing. He dozed again; and when next he awoke there were other sounds that banished sleep. Shots. Not one or two, or a scattered few, but volleys. And shouts, distant but coming nearer. Then Peruvio's voice rose in a triumphant shout; and boats bumped against the ship's side. There were curses, and native voices in rage and

shrill, hysterical terror.

Thuds of bodies on the deck planks; a hatch removed beyond the trade room bulkhead; then the tumbled sounds and groans of people handled too roughly; the clink-clank of the windlass and the squeal of gear. He heard the boats lowered to the hatch above him, and there was a freshet of angry sounds coming nearer; but then the *Scorpion* leaned gently, as the wind filled her sails, and the sea began to tinkle as it slid past her hull; and the shouts and angry sounds died.

Peter waited impatiently When would they let him out? Presently he heard the key turn in the lock, and he rushed out, almost into Peruvio's arms.

"Homeward bound, now, Peter!" The skipper chuckled. "You needn't be shut up again, unless you want to be. Sweet dreams."

Peruvio offered Peter a drink from the bottle he uncorked, but Peter burst past and ran on deck. The moon was far down in the west. Astern, the island lay black, except for red beads of fires lighted on the beach. The creaming surf on the reef was touched as with blood by them. The *Scorpion* again sailed in ghostly silence. A hand reached out, took Peter's wrist, drew him back into the companionway.

"Better turn in, old feller. Don't start no rookus now, if you got the sense you was born wiv!" Jinks advised him, and gently urged him below.

CHAPTER VIII

FLENCHER'S GAME

PETER ROWLES was no hero, but he was far from being the fool he might appear; and if he duly respected the advice of Jovial Jinks, it was because he had found Jinks a good adviser in the past, if not actually a friend. He wanted no cruel beating up such as poor Bill Blades had suffered; nor was he yearning to have his hair parted with the brass arc of a sextant. But as he gazed at the receding island, and turned from it to the setting moon, he knew that, even allowing for diversion for safety around reefs, the *Scorpion* was steering very wide of any course for Tahiti, or Penrhyn. Maxon stepped silently beside him and Maxon smelled of rum.

"Soon be home now, Peter," said he.

Peter gave a slight start. The words were almost precisely those of Flencher's.

"You must think me a fool!" he snapped. "When the ship is turned right around I'll be satisfied she's heading for Penrhyn."

"Penrhyn! You are easy," chuckled Maxon.

"Tahiti either."

"Peter Simple, no other." The mate laughed. "I'm surprised at you, Peter. Did you really think Flencher Peruvio would take the trouble to go out of his way for anybody?"

Maxon suddenly checked himself, and the humorous look on his face changed to something like fear. He had let his tongue wag more in two minutes than in all the passage to date.

"But you see him yourself—in the morning," he added hurriedly. "Not now, unless you're as simple as you sound!"

Peter stared, but the mate walked away, leaving him filled to his toes with boiling temper. Once he started to rush below, to drag Flencher from his bed; he thought better of that, and began to pace the silent decks rapidly, hoping to cool down so that he could think over the staggering hint the mate had let fall. As he stepped alongside the main hatch, which was fastened down and battened, he heard a dull moaning underdeck. His blood chilled. What could he do, unarmed and alone, against the evil, cold devil responsible for that?

Sleep was impossible, until he had forced Flencher to explain: that was one thing that fixed itself in his mind as his blood cooled. He saw the first gray and pearl and pink of the dawn in the east, and it was right over the

stock of the port anchor. He wanted no more proof of the ship's course. She had sailed north or east, or somewhere between, since leaving Suva; what lay beyond her gracefully lifting jibboom now? He leaned on the bulwark rail, seeking for some inspiration.

Naka opened his galley and stirred the fire. Naka's smile was as broad and sunny as ever. The bell struck, and a man slipped noiselessly aft to relieve the wheel; and his mate slipped as noiselessly forward when relieved. Neither paid any attention to Peter. Maxon seemed tireless. He was on deck three parts of the time, yet never showed dissatisfaction or weariness. Flencher stood watch, it appeared, only to give the mate the modicum of sleep essential to keep him alert.

As day broadened, men appeared, and the main hatch was opened. Buckets of water were lowered through it, and presently Naka sent down a tub of boiled corn meal and salt fish which had been cooking for hours on the banked stove. Peter looked into the hold. The uprising effluvium sent him reeling back. Clamorous voices rose too; and the food and water only partially silenced them. There were savage voices, and moaning voices, and shrill cries of protest; men's voices and women's, all holding the tone and timbre of youth.

Peter braced himself to look again, when the fresh air had thinned the fog in the hatchway. There lay fifty naked brown natives, ironed to two long chains padlocked to stanchions, and some of them bore red scars on their shining brown bodies. Two of the crew jumped below and passed the food along; then they examined the hurts and washed the worst of them. One man was severely hurt, and they hoisted him on deck and told the mate, who quickly summoned Flencher.

It was a shock to Peter to see the skipper appear with his medicine kit. Flencher noticed nobody but the injured native. He rolled his sleeves and went to work like a seasoned surgeon to probe for and find a lead slug in the man's breast. Peter was amazed. Always some astounding side to this puzzling Flencher cropped up to ruin any opinion formed about him. Gytha had said how little he seemed to know about curing his own pains; but the way he dressed this poor brown fellow and made him comfortable was expert, and he really had a look of anxiety in his eyes as he ordered men to rig an awning over the man and let him remain on deck. This must be the best possible moment, thought Peter, and followed the skipper aft when the job was done.

"Maxon, you can unlock those people and give them the run of the ship at noon," Flencher told the mate; then turned to find an aggressive Peter confronting him.

"Well, Peter, soon be home now." He grinned, then his eyes reddened as he detected Peter's anger.

Peter let go all his bottled up indignation. Gytha, coming on deck to enjoy the cool morning before making her own attack on the skipper, stopped short in the companion door, her face white with apprehension for Peter.

"You're right! Home it is! And you're going to turn round and head for it without more damned foolishness. If you're not utterly crazy, you must know you can't putter all over the Pacific with a couple of passengers who contracted with you to carry them elsewhere. Don't grin at me, Peruvio! I know the ship's not steering for anywhere Miss Crosbie wants to go, or me either. If she was, you'd be sticking your head in a loop over those slaves in your hold."

"Slaves, Peter?" The Flencher's tone was gentle, pained. "Did you see me dressing that man's wound? Was that behaving like a heartless slaver, Peter? I'm sure—"

"I tell you I'm not taking any more of your soft soap! Where are you taking us to? If you say Tahiti, you lie! If you say Penrhyn, you lie! Maxon told me that I was a gullible fool to ever think so—"

A STARTLING change came over Peruvio. Up to that moment he had treated Peter with quizzical indulgence. Now he swung around upon the mate, and the red in his eyes burst into flame. He spoke no word but, drawing his right hand from his pocket, he slithered forward without a visible effort, his fist flashed upward, and Maxon dropped to the deck at his feet with blood spurting from a cheek laid open from eye to lip.

Flencher had not even dropped the medicine box. It was as effortless as a movement of machinery; and the girl at the companion door hurriedly covered her lips with a cold hand to press back a scream.

But Peter saw red. While he was being prodded on by Flencher's cool humor, he found words; now, with Maxon's blood spattering him, he saw nothing but a crimson mist in which the Flencher's face grinned at him like a Siamese mask. He went utterly crazy. The medicine box dropped with a crash, and Flencher's eyes widened with stupefaction as Peter's unseasoned fists beat against his face. Peter's boxing had been of the orthodox sort, depending much on speed and fancy footwork. It enabled him to punch that grim face twenty times before Flencher got one thudding jolt into Peter's stomach.

After that it was a fight in name only. Peter's senses left him, and he fought instinctively; while Flencher held him off with one hand and coolly picked spots on which to land damaging blows which flayed and crushed and only failed to hurt because Peter had passed beyond feeling.

Peter did not hear Gytha's cry of horror, or, later, her angry verdict on the skipper. He was held up just as long as Flencher cared to have him to hit, then he was flung to the deck and he never felt the kick that broke a rib. He felt nothing, until he opened his eyes to a more than usually terrific pang, and found the grinning face of Tug Lammas bending over him, and the agonizingly tender hands of Bill Blades swabbing his cuts with salt water and iodine.

"There you are, my bold bucko!" Tug grinned. "Nobody ever stood up long enough to take more 'n one wallop from Flencher before."

"An' you wouldn't, if he hadn't held you up to give you a proper going over!" growled Blades, dragging an iodine swab along the deep cut that stretched from Peter's mouth to his chin.

"Don't you believe Bill, my hero," said Tug. "He's jealous. It only took a couple o' wallops to keel him over, and he never even touched the skipper. You did give him a snootful o' blood. You lay still, now. Here, drink a shot o' red liquor. Put life into you, it will."

"How did I get here?" groaned Peter, trying out of puffed eyes to identify the low beams and tiered bunks of the forecastle.

"We dumped you here. He says you belong here now," Bill told him. "Better hold yer yapper, just the same. You see what Maxon got for openin' his."

Peter felt the rum steaming up his insides; and as the numbness wore off his torture began. He could scarcely see, one ear felt as big as a potato, and most of his teeth did not meet as they should. There was an excruciating pain in his side, and his head throbbed. He was in a mess. And the men around him were not dumb, as he had sometimes believed them. All talked now, though not to him. Perhaps it was only on deck they were dumb.

There was rum, too; lots of it. That may have loosened tongues. Very likely it was the custom to issue grog after a raid. He found many things buzzing in his head besides the echoes of Flencher's terrific beating. Now the fat was in the fire, what about Gytha?

HE LAY quietly for awhile, until the sharpest of his pains grew duller, and fell into a dazed sort of slumber in which the weirdest things happened. The Flencher was gently dressing his tortured

side; the Flencher was speaking to him in a quiet, soothing voice; the Flencher in short was visiting him like an angel unawares, while the men in the forecastle crouched in their bunks and hushed their chatter.

"So you mustn't get fighting again, Peter. You might come off worse another time, and I shall need you for your own work on my island."

That was Flencher's voice; and Peter, opening his puffy eyes with his fingers, looked up into the concerned gaze of Flencher himself.

"That's better, Peter. Only a rib broken. That'll be all right in a few days. Govern your temper, my laddie, and you'll live long and make many a plant grow fruit that was but a weed before. Have no uneasiness about Miss Crosbie. She wanted to come to see you, Peter, but it is better not, at present. She asked me to tell you, however, that she is quite easy and has resigned herself to my direction."

"That, of course, is a lie," mumbled Peter, and shut his eyes on the hypocritical face above him.

Flencher sighed, picked up his surgical gear and left the forecastle. The men talked again, and Peter felt irrepressible contempt for them.

"You can chatter when he's not around, but let him look at you and you're a lot of damned sheep!" Peter flung at them. "A crazy man, a brute and a bully, a silly jigsaw puzzle maniac, and he rides a shipload of husky white men ragged, any one big enough to eat him raw! A lot of swabs, you are, letting him get away with kidnaping a decent girl like Miss Crosbie, to say nothing of me."

"I allus said he went too far messin' about with that gal," agreed Tug Lammas, shaking his head which was getting fuddled with rum.

"Hell! What do it matter who he messes about with for a few months? Maybe she's all he'll have left after he's taken us to the boodle," growled a one-eyed seaman who had never ventured a word in Peter's hearing before.

"Shut yer trap!" warned Bill Blades, glancing up through the hatchway. "Peter, you don't think a crowd of able seamen'd take what Flencher's givin' us for no profit, would you? Do we look like a bunch o' sissies?"

"You do!" rasped Peter painfully. "Sissies, that's the word. Why else do you put up with that bone breaking brute?"

"I thought you knew. Why else did you ship?"

"That's a joke. Don't make me laugh, with this sore face. I took passage for Penrhyn, you fool."

Bill exchanged glances with Tug. Tug leaned over the bunk where Peter suffered.

"Ain't you been doin' them puzzles 'long o' him, Peter? 'Course you have. And ain't you got on to it yet?"

"On to what, you lunatic?" groaned Peter. "Have you all been doing puzzles until you're woozy? Even Jinks knows how silly it is. Isn't he always saying Flencher never can do a puzzle?"

"That's the very thing!" whispered Tug. "We been sailin' with Flencher for a year now, takin' all he can do, and carryin' on because he's got a lot o' boodle—treasure, Peter, on the blessed island he calls his home. Now he's goin' to the spot. Ain't he got a crowd o' natives for the diggin'? Ain't the trade room filled with diggin' tools?"

"What's that got to do with jigsaw puzzles?"

"That puzzle's his chart! When that's put together, the chart's complete. We been takin' his guff for a year or more, and we ain't goin' to complain if we—"

"Then why does Jinks insist he can't do it? Miss Crosbie says it's impossible—that parts are missing."

"That's Jinks!" Blades chuckled, thoughtlessly whacking Peter's tormented head. "Jinks is one of us, my bucko. Jinks pinched some of the bits. We got Flencher by the short hairs, and he thinks that's where he's got us! But when time comes, we got the bulge on

him." He leered knowingly.

"And you're in with us, Peter," whispered Tug. "We can use a feller with bowels like you. You'll be harder next time you try to bust his snoot. You got brains, too. That's what we'll want when we have to figger out how to swipe the boodle and leave him behind with his precious gal."

"Yes, you'll certainly require brains then!" retorted Peter shortly.

A hail came down from the deck; and Blades went up to steer. It was dinner time, and the smell of food sickened Peter. He turned around with his face to the ship's side and tried to shut out the warm odors. While men clattered knives and spoons on plates and pannikins, and the reek of rum mingled with the tang of pea soup and fat salt pork, Peter fell into a stupefied sleep out of which he awoke hours later with many of his pains gone.

The forecastle was dark, and the hatch was closed. There was a giddy motion, and the thunder of seas at the bows; the cold shot of sprays pattering on the hatch. Afar off the voices of men and the flap of sails indicated a change in the weather. Through the bulkhead came the frightened sounds of the battened in natives.

CHAPTER IX

FLENCHER'S HUMANITY

THE *Scorpion* was laboring. Peter dragged himself on deck after a night of stark pain in which the ship's stomach-turning motion hurled him about in his narrow bunk and made him acquainted with the hard spots. Somebody had brought him a mug of strong coffee with rum in it; and though the smell of the spirit caused his nose to wrinkle, the effect when he got it down was surprisingly strengthening. His side ached, but Flencher's bandage had been well applied, and except for the difficulty presented by the ship's uneasiness he managed to reach the deck fairly well. No one noticed him.

The forecastle slide had been shut; when he crawled out and closed it after him, he found himself in a terribly shivery world. The chill struck through to his bones after so many hours in the unaccustomed warmth of the close forecastle. The decks streamed with seething water; the tall spars were gaunt and naked, stripped to two staysails under which the vessel was apparently hove-to.

The ocean rolled gray and bleak from horizon to horizon. Seas, such as he had never imagined a ship could live in, frightened Peter for a moment. He saw the *Scorpion* rise to them gallantly, shake her decks free, and plunge again to fill her scuppers with bubbling foam.

Aft, an oilskinned seaman stood at the helm, though it was lashed. Flencher Peruvio lolled against the weather side of the companionway house, watching his ship in the same casual fashion as he watched men. He irradiated a supreme mastery over ship and sea that in any other man must have enlisted utter loyalty in his subordinates. Even Peter, angry as he was, felt a sense of security taking hold of him when he noticed the unruffled calm of the man.

Two men on the foreyard finished wrapping storm gaskets around the sodden canvas and climbed nimbly down, waiting at the sheerpole for a chance to drop to the deck between seas. Peter had reached what he thought was shelter, in the lee of the galley. They joined him there.

"Feed the passengers!" yelled Flencher when he saw them.

Peter snorted at the term. He had been beaten up, but he still meant to force satisfaction from the skipper; and to hear a lot of stolen natives called passengers, after his own experience, made his gorge rise. The men flung open the galley door, and Naka was waiting for them. Naka smiled as sunnily as ever, though there was no sun. He handed out a tub of rice, and a pail of boiled tea syrupy with raw sugar.

"Lend a hand to open the hatch, Peter," one of the men growled, and the three of them contrived to pass down the food and recover the hatch between one crashing sea and another.

That was all the work done that day, until a second feeding just before dark; and Peter found new wonder in the Flencher's methods. A man who could carry off a girl like Gytha, and treat her decently to all appearances, beat up another passenger, Peter himself, and chuck him into the forecastle; mend his hurts as tenderly as any woman too; steal under gunfire half a hundred islanders and clap them under hatches, yet risk filling his ship in a storm to feed them regularly—that man by any test was a mystery, and so Peter found him. When the first chill had passed, Peter was fascinated in watching developments.

Maxon appeared twice, while Flencher went below for his meals; otherwise the skipper kept ward over his ship as tenderly as any reputable clipper ship master under a world famous flag. Seeing him there, alert and calm, it was hard to believe that any danger existed; yet the heavens and the ocean screamed danger.

Peter had seen one mild hurricane in the Pacific—he had been assured it was a mild one—but in it two much bigger ships than the *Scorpion* were reduced to kindling wood on Tonga beach; seven native huts were heaped into one ragged pile of wreckage, with the occupants inside. He had watched the progress of that storm from the comparative security of the stone built cottage of a missionary, and all the assurance in the world had failed to prevent his shivering at the appalling aspect of the world within his view.

THE black skies had looked to be solid, sweeping so low that sea and sky were one; he had seen the rollers smash over the reef and thunder on the beach in broken fury; and broken as they were, he had seen boulders and bits of the reef carried high up the sand like wooden skittles. Peter had seen all that with his own eyes, in what was called a mild hurricane.

None of that compared with this. Never a sea rose to windward but he ducked his head in apprehension that it must come crashing on board and sweep all to destruction. He never felt the swift uprising of the bows but he felt his stomach turn over and believed he must, in the very next instant, be hurled down the dizzy slope aft and over the stern.

Those great seas rising to windward threatened; another ship they might have crushed; but not the *Scorpion*. She could not rise so swiftly as to keep her decks dry, but the water that came thundering over her rails was only the spiteful spittle of the foiled sea.

"There was no sign of it last night!" Peter screamed at the man nearest to him.

"'Twon't last, sonny," the man shouted back. "Short notice, soon past. A heller while she lasts, though. Look out! Get a holt!"

Peter missed the man and his mate. They were scrambling on top of the galley before he realized the warning. They reached down for his hands, but Peter was not quickwitted enough. Dumbly he sensed a formidable shape rushing down on the ship from windward. His legs seemed to be frozen. The men bawled at him, but he could not respond.

"Get up there, you lump!" pealed Flencher's voice, and then Peter came to belated life.

Flencher started toward him. The galley door was flung open; Naka's powerful arm snaked out and hauled him inside. The door crashed shut, and Naka shot the bolt as the vessel reeled and staggered to the impact of a growling sea that turned to water gone mad as it struck the deck. Through the porthole Peter saw the deck vanish under a furious sea, rail deep; the masts stood up from water as from a drowned ship; and on its crest went hurtling the form

of the Flencher, rolled over and over, his masterful arms unable to save him.

Naka struggled to open the door again. The weight of water outside it balked him. Peter never forgot that moment. The big black cook fought against the water until his muscles cracked; for the first time he was not smiling. Horrible sounds issued from his voiceless mouth. He gripped Peter's arm and forced him to the job, and Peter added his poor strength and smothered the pain of his hurts.

The door moved. The sea pouring off with the vessel's list lessened the weight. Suddenly it flew open, and the galley was flooded with water. But Naka was out like a fish, mouthing terribly. He moved as if by instinct.

Peter tried to hold the door open, and almost lost his fingers. But he could see through the porthole; and he saw Naka go headlong through the churning foam to the fore-rigging, where other eyes might never have caught a glimpse of the straining hand fast slipping from a desperate hold. Naka saw it, and reached it. He got his steel sinewed grip upon Flencher's wrist just when the beaten fingers let go, and, without regard for his own security, put both hands to the task and slowly dragged Flencher on board.

Was there any effusive recognition? Peter felt his throat tighten at the splendor of Naka's act. Flencher spat out water, brushed the hair from his eyes, and uttered a short, harsh laugh. He made his way aft without a word. Naka returned to his galley as if nothing out of the way had happened.

"Get down off there and stay in the galley, you men!" yelled Flencher when his breath came back to him. "And keep that damned Peter safe!"

"Nigh lost the Old Man, you did!" growled one of the men as the galley door opened and closed again. "Why the hell didn't you jump 'long o' us?"

Peter accepted the reproof in silence. The presence of mind of the men of the sea was a constant wonder to him. He thought hard, seeking to guess what debt Naka owed such a man to make him risk his life to save Flencher Peruvio. Later he uttered the thought to the men while Naka was carrying the cabin food aft.

"Debt's right!" they growled at him. "Not the sort *you'd* guess, though!"

FLENCHER never left the deck all night. Peter knew, because he stayed in the galley himself and, sleepless, peered out through the spray crusted glass of the porthole every few minutes. Always that silent, immovable figure, watching every onset of the sea, each brave defense of the ship, keeping safe, with his own tireless brain and his own sea born cunning, a cargo of humanity in which no spark could well exist of love for him.

With a watery light came a lull. The gale fell to a mere tempest, and Flencher left his shelter and stood at the forward rail of the quarterdeck scanning the heavens for signs. To Peter, the skies promised speedy tranquillity; Flencher returned to his place beside the companionway; and in ten minutes came the reason. The wind had stopped for breath. It came again, with redoubled force, though in the northwest was a patch of dirty blue big enough to make a sailor a shirt. The seas grew more tortured with a slight change of direction in the wind; they tumbled on board with greater violence, following each other too rapidly for the ship to gather herself to meet them.

The smokestack blew off the galley, and a sea poured in through the hole, drenching the stove and filling the galley with ashes and steam. But Naka shook his woolly head and smiled on, going to work to rebuild his fire without fuss. It marked the end of the storm; for in ten minutes more the patch of blue was clean instead of dirty, it was big enough to make ten sailors' shirts, and the sun struck a spear of pale yellow through an evil black cloud flying like a runaway dirigible downwind.

"Set the foretopsail!" shouted Flencher, and in a moment the decks were full of men. Maxon appeared, and once more the clash of gear and the thrashing of canvas were followed soon by the steep leaning of the ship and the rush of water past her flanks.

Flencher vanished. No man could stand watch longer. Peter left the galley and started toward the forecastle again, eating a biscuit as he stumbled along.

"Hold on, Peter!" Flencher was out again. He came along with Gytha holding his arm, carrying his medicine chest. "Hold on, Peter. Lend a hand below, will you?"

Such civility! After such a night! And Gytha, too, not looking at all as if she had suffered. Peter leaped to join them at the main hatch, his broken rib reminding him that he was no athlete. Gytha smiled at him, and if her lips seemed to quiver suspiciously, her eyes were bright enough. The hatch was opened, and again that rush of fetid air made them stand back for a moment before daring the ladder. Then a lantern showed a picture such as slave ships on the Middle Passage must often have presented. Gytha uttered a cry. Peter gasped.

Flencher began to speak. He spoke the tongue of the natives; spoke it fluently, and with so kindly a note that the effect was miraculous. Huddled lads and girls, flung everywhere by the motion of the storm, moaning and glaring in panic at the visitors, stopped moaning and crawled into the open space under the hatch. Here and there a brown body or limb was bruised or cut; Flencher opened the medicine chest and got to work.

"You can do this too," he told Peter.

Gytha dressed wounds under his direction. One or two more painful cases were hoisted on deck. The sprays still flew, but the sun was out, and there was a definite weather and lee side now. The deck was drying in a cloud of steam already where the sun fell on it. The day was brightening.

For a full hour Flencher labored below, then he seemed to be satisfied that his own part was done. He looked tired at last.

"You two carry on and finish up here," he said wearily. "Soon as you've done, Peter, get for'ard where you belong. You hurry aft, Gytha. I'll need you."

For some minutes after he left, Peter worked in silence, then he looked up to find the girl's eyes fixed curiously upon him. They had almost finished. The cook had sent down food for the natives unable to get on deck, but most were eating and chattering in the sunlight.

"Peter," said Gytha, "Peruvio told me an amazing tale last night. You'd never believe the wildness of it. What do you suppose his game really is? I know he told us some silly stuff, but the truth is too utterly mad to believe."

"Yes, I know," said Peter, "but let's hear what he told you. He's a liar, anyhow, and mad, so I know he wouldn't tell you the truth."

"Well—" she hesitated. Her eyes held a twinkle in spite of her noticeable uneasiness. "Well, Peter, the man can't be sane, as you say, but if his madness has carried him so far I don't see that it matters whether he's mad or sane so far as we're concerned. Do you know, the man's got an idea to set up a sort of Garden of Eden! Please be quiet, Peter. He's taken these natives to work and breed workers. He's going to make the white seamen build houses and oversee the natives.

"The ship's loaded with all sorts of agricultural equipment, and his island's already lush with natural fruits and vegetation. There are fish abounding, and two or three years ago he landed some pigs and poultry and expects by now there's all the food needed to carry on while his kingdom is getting on its feet." She paused and laughed quietly. "Peter, you've been kidnaped to take charge of a fine agricultural station—from which, I'm afraid, he means you are never to escape."

"If it's no yarn, but in a way true," retorted Peter, "what about you? What did he kidnap you for, Gytha?"

A sudden film of fear clouded her eyes, and her breath fluttered. Peter hastily sought to reassure her. He too laughed.

"What a yarn!" He pressed her hand reassuringly. "Let me spin one now, then you can laugh right out loud."

He told her the treasure yarn, and gradually her smile returned; but that she did not believe it was evident. When he had done, she shook her head.

"If the treasure yarn's true, why bother about us?"

"If it isn't, why do all the men go about like dummies? Why does he half kill anybody who opens his mouth?" Peter demanded. "You've seen him poring over his silly jigsaw puzzle. You've helped him. Can you see its ever being completed? You can't, because some pieces are missing, and—"

He glanced fearfully around the hatchway—

"Jinks has stolen them! The men mean to take his treasure, and leave him on the island. That's why they have sailed with him and put up with his bone breaking brutality, Gytha! Believe me, it's a more reasonable yarn than yours."

The girl finished her last bandage, and stood up. Her face was pale and her eyes no longer bright.

"There's no treasure, Peter. That puzzle's but a puzzle. He's mad—simply mad—and dangerous." She suddenly shrugged her shoulders and managed to smile at his concerned attitude. "But don't be uneasy about me," she said. "Mr. Maxon's very kind. He assures me he'll let no harm come to me. Otherwise I don't believe I could take it so calmly."

"I've noticed Maxon's pretty keen about you," grumbled Peter. Seeing the cloud in her eyes again, he hastily added, "Treasure or no, don't worry, Gytha. We'll find means to fix him. We'll leave him to his island and pinch his ship."

CHAPTER X

THIRST

THE *Scorpion* crawled along. Flencher walked the decks with a new air, as if his goal were in sight. Even the men began to use their voices about the decks, and he disregarded them. A general atmosphere of lightness obtained instead of the earlier gloom. If men did not actually treat Flencher with familiarity, they showed none of their former slavish fear of him; and it was because of his own attitude toward them rather than any growing boldness of theirs.

If there was anything in his aspect comparable with his better known bearing, it came out if he found Gytha walking or talking with Maxon. And Maxon, though revealing much less awe than formerly, still showed a lively respect for his skipper and made no effort to assert himself where the girl was concerned. As for Gytha, since she had spoken to Peter about the situation, she looked upon her predicament much more cheerfully. She ventured to rally Flencher about it. Believing him mad, she could feel jocular.

"Suppose everything goes as you hope, and you really set up as a sort of king of the cannibal islands, with my humble self as a most unwilling queen—"

"You won't be unwilling for long," he interrupted.

"Well, then, even supposing I am compelled to submit and appear willing to save myself trouble, surely you don't imagine you can put all these people on an island in the Twentieth Century of airplanes and wireless and keep them forever without contact with the world? Somebody's going to get restless and push off; then you'll have trouble down on you like a ton of bricks, and the least of it won't be on the score of kidnaping us, to say nothing about these poor natives."

Flencher smiled at her almost indulgently.

"And you can't keep men under your

thumb, as you have kept these, and put them to digging treasure," she said with sudden heat, irritated by his smile.

He stopped her with a word.

"Ah, the treasure!" He chuckled, and left her still puzzled.

Days followed when the brigantine's decks were lively and almost joyous. The fifty brown men and women had absolute freedom now and, full fed and no longer confined, seemed to be finding that content that comes so easily to their kind. They were treated very well indeed; Flencher saw to that personally. They could separate into couples, and it was encouraged; only if one of the white crew evinced ardor toward a brown female did Flencher's dormant fury threaten to flare up.

A seaman came from the wheel and began to grumble. He had heard Flencher and the girl talking. He doubted the existence of that treasure.

"She chipped him about it, and he give her the merry laugh," the man stated.

"Why wouldn't he?" demanded Bill Blades. "He ain't mad enough to tell anybody, not even her."

"Well, she's been doin' them puzzles, ain't she?"

"What's that got to do with it?"

"That floosey ain't no fool. She'd smell it if that blinkin' puzzle was a chart, wouldn't she?"

" 'Cause why? Jinks told us he's got the pieces, didn't he? Nobody could finish that chart without them bits, and when time comes Jinks 'll produce. How about it, Peter?"

Peter laughed lightly. He felt much better since his hurts were healing and his rib felt as it it were mending. He had been beaten up by the terrible Flencher, and had survived. The experience had done him good, for he no longer felt terrified at the thought of a real fight. Next time he would do better, because he'd be tougher; he was sure the worst that Flencher could do could not be worse than he had already done.

So Peter was coming into full manhood physically; his world was changing, but he rather liked the change. These men already regarded him as a good recruit, and now they wanted his views. He felt much more important in the stuffy forecastle than he had ever felt in the more spacious cabin.

"If you really want my opinion," he said indifferently, "the man's simply crazy. If there is an island at all, you'll soon see him scrabbling the earth with his hands."

"Huh! You're in with him!" snarled Lank Byles. "He sent you for'ard to spy on us, shouldn't wonder."

"I came for'ard like a spy, didn't I?" Peter grinned, turned and left them.

As he left, he heard the start of a fine argument between Lank and his friends, and Tug Lammas and Bill Blades with their followers.

AS HE lounged at the weather rail, smoking one of his strong cigars which Flencher had sent forward to him along with the rest of his gear, Jinks entered the galley. The gloomy little steward and the laughing dumb black cook saw a lot of each other in the course of their duties, but never appeared to have any particular feelings toward each other. So far as the steward ever showed cordiality to anybody, he showed it in his one sided conversations with Naka. Now something had got in between them.

Peter heard Jinks chattering, and soon his voice rose to a scream. What it was remained for the moment a mystery, like so many things aboard the *Scorpion;* but suddenly Jinks left the galley at a run, spitting oaths behind him, and Naka stood in the galley doorway shaking a cleaver and frothing at the mouth in his effort to utter what his poor dumb mouth forbade him.

The next time Jinks had to visit the galley he carried a hatchet, and Peter edged nearer. But Naka was smiling again, as if nothing had happened; though Jinks backed out this time, instead of turning his back on the big

black, he need not have done so, for Naka's smile had returned to stay. It very much puzzled Peter.

Flencher began to take extreme care with his reckoning. Besides the morning, noon and afternoon observations of the sun, he took star sights and often climbed aloft with binoculars. The whisper went around that the island was near. Men slapped each other's backs, and the two gangs of opposite opinions dropped all differences because they would soon know the truth. Flencher laughed more frequently, and the ration of rum was increased. But the breeze was very light, and it fell to faint airs.

Under a blazing sun, with no wind, the ship rolled sluggishly, lifting to the glassy hills of blue water with a swoop that unsettled the stomachs of the hardiest, sinking into the hollows with a clatter and crash of gear and a savage jerk at braces and sheets which kept the whole fabric in uproar. Flencher grew uneasy as day followed day, and the wind died utterly.

There was no work for the men to do. They sluiced the decks in the morning, and again the job was done by the natives at noon. After that, there was nothing to do but stew in whatever shade might be contrived and mutter over all the old arguments again. The decks were too hot for the naked skin to touch; even the natives grew sickly and crawled below.

Pitch from the seams blistered the skin and jerked it off. Naka's galley was an inferno, for whatever else went undone, those fifty brown people must be fed. Naka suffered with a smile, if he suffered at all. Peter suffered more than anybody forward, for he had more brain, or used it to more effect. He heard growling and muttering, and was fearful of what it might lead to.

Then the day came when Maxon reported that the fresh water was running low. The ship had rolled and sweltered for a week and had moved not a mile. Flencher appeared on deck with anger boiling in him. In all his calculations he had made no slip but this, and this was the worst possible. He had underestimated the drain on the water tanks of fifty brown passengers.

"Cut it down to two pints a day for the natives," he ordered.

"Regular rations for the crew?" queried Maxon.

"Damn the crew! Give 'em a pint each, and double their rum," snarled Peruvio; and for an hour he walked the deck in tempestuous mood, searching all quarters for sign of wind or rain.

The rum satisfied the men for awhile. It was when they awoke after a steamy, uneasy sleep that they wanted water. Then the forecastle was full of rumblings, and Peter grew uncomfortable at the trend of the talk. He let the rum alone, so suffered less from thirst; but thirsty he was, and too well he realized that such men as these, prompted by appetite, might very quickly forget their awe of Flencher Peruvio who was responsible for their suffering.

When the calm had lasted two days more, and the water was still reduced for them in order that the natives should be fed, Jinks, who brought the news along, and brought a still bigger rum ration with it, found himself swept into a noisy conclave in which Peter tried vainly to stay neutral.

"He ain't goin' without water, is he?" demanded Blades.

"Nor that gal?" said Lank. "Got a private tank, ain't they, Jinks?"

"Don't arsk me!" whined Jinks. "I got trouble enough, wivout you makin' more for me."

"Come out with it!" growled Tug Lammas, gripping Jinks by a skinny arm. "There's water aft, ain't there?"

"Not much, s'help me there ain't, Tug!" panted Jinks. "Here, 'ave a swig o' good navy rum. It'll rain soon. Fer Gawd's sake don't git fussy now we're almost in sight of a million!"

Jinks escaped, but the rumbling went on. Why go thirsty for the sake of a lot o' niggers? White men suffer dry gullets for them? There was water

enough for the crew. Fifty niggers could drink enough water in a day to last the crew a week or more.

"You ain't sufferin', you ain't," Blades told Lank, who was at the rum kettle again.

"The hell I ain't!" swore Lank, spitting thickly. "Who knows this stinkin' calm won't last another week?"

BUT the rum silenced them. Peter put a little rum in his ration of water, which was warm and thick with rust, so managed to exist, keeping as inactive as possible; but the next day there was no water at all for the forecastle, and still Naka sent down full pails to the hold. An awning had been stretched over the quarterdeck; but it was not sufficient, and nobody appeared outside the saloon if avoidable during the day's heat. The suggestion was that the after gang were lolling in luxurious coolness, while the men who must do all the work stewed and fainted in the oven of the forecastle. The thought grew into a conviction.

"Let's turn 'em out!" shouted Lank, fiercely. "Make the Flencher show his hand! He's got water for that gal."

"Come on, bullies," one of his mates joined in hoarsely. "Make him share while there's any left. We'll dump them niggers overboard—"

"If he cuts up rusty—"

"I been lookin' for a chance—"

"Needn't chuck the women over—yet—"

"Come on! You with us, Peter? We'll leave the gal to you—"

"The hell you will! I like her looks!"

Unreason, fury, and the mob. Peter shivered in the heat and followed them on deck, for this was madness gone too far to be stayed by speech. Speech started it, but only dire action could stop it, and he feared that action. The men were not without shrewdness, even in their fury; for while most of them went straight to the saloon companionway, others threw off a corner of the trade room hatch and dropped below. The only remaining water supply was in a tank down there.

Peter placed himself in the front of the party seeking the saloon; he believed he might yet prevent serious trouble, and when he encountered Maxon on the companionway lockers he hurried to tell him what the men wanted.

"They only ask equal rations with the natives," said Peter, and added in a swift whisper, "I'm afraid for Miss Crosbie if they run loose down here!"

"God help 'em!" snapped Maxon.

He tried to halt the men, but they overran him and tumbled him down the stairs. Men in the trade room shouted exultantly, and those now standing in the saloon, blinking in the cool darkness after the glare of the blistering deck, turned to answer the shout and burst through to join them by the door which had twice received Peter's captive form.

All but Lank. Lank dimly discerned in the gloom two figures at the farthest end of the table. Peruvio and Gytha, languidly fitting bits of a puzzle. Lank stepped forward, full of Dutch courage, rushing on his fate.

"You and yer silly bits o' wood!" he shouted. "Give us our fair rations o' water, Flencher. We gets water, or we chucks overboard them niggers—"

"Who's in the trade room?" snapped Flencher, staring insolently past Lank at Maxon. "That you, Peter? You in with this fool? Clap on the trade room hatch, Maxon! Peter, lock that door!"

Lank leaned forward and reached for Flencher's throat, stuttering with thirsty fury. Flencher stood up, shoving the puzzle board on to the floor, and brushed aside Lank's menacing hand. Then Lank went utterly mad. He reached up to the rack above the table, grabbed a heavy decanter and swung it hard at Flencher's head. The blow landed glancingly; blood trickled from Flencher's eyebrow, but he had drawn back so that only the bottom of the decanter scraped him. His face went dark, the blood was at his lips and he grinned terribly.

His hand went to his pocket, and Lank prepared to guard the brass knuckled blow that always followed that movement; but Flencher fooled him as he often fooled men, for no brass knuckles flashed this time. Instead a muffled crash split the thick air, smoke crept through the linen pocket, and Lank swayed with a silly grin on his face before toppling like a falling mast among the chairs, his heart bored through.

Gytha sprang to her feet, horror in her face. Peter stood staring down at Lank, looking as if something he had held had suddenly disappeared.

"I told you to lock that trade room door!" Flencher yelped at him.

That was all. Then out from the trade room crowded the men, startled by the shot. They, who had come aft prepared for any violence, stood like a mob of sheep in the presence of the man who had taken the offensive. They drank water in the trade room without a thought of anything more deadly. Water was what they had wanted, and they had not missed Lank. Now, at that shot, they trooped upon the scene, leaving the water running from the tank.

"Get back in there!" Flencher said quietly, stepping toward them with his gun thrust forward. "In with you! Water you want, is it? All the water in the ship is there. Ten gallons. You can have it. Back with you!"

He forced them inside, locking the door. Gytha had run on deck, and Peter followed her. They heard Flencher cursing Lank, and ordering Jinks to drag him away and dump him. Maxon sat on the trade room hatch, reaching for wedges with his toes and fastening them in hand tight while Naka ran to get a maul.

"Peter, neither Peruvio nor Maxon have had more water than the men," Gytha whispered agitatedly. "I've had plenty. But now they've done this, I'm afraid. He's likely to— Oh, I saw that man's face as he fell, Peter! What shall I do?"

Flencher appeared.

"You were with that rabble!" he charged, the red smoldering in his eyes.

Peter faced him boldly, for it was useless to show the fear he really felt.

"Only on Miss Crosbie's account," he said.

"Safer to mind your own business," Flencher snarled. "Miss Crosbie's able to take care of herself; if not, I can supply all the protection she needs. That hatch fast, Maxon?"

"Safe as a church," growled Maxon.

"Then come aft and stand your watch. If you hadn't been sleeping, those dogs wouldn't have spoiled our afternoon's rest. Peter, you sit tight on that hatch and don't dare move until I give you leave. If I didn't want your help pretty soon you'd go below with the rest of the pack and stay there till you all went over the side together!"

"You can't mean—" Gytha faltered, sensing the stark meaning in the words uttered so casually.

"They stole the water," he retorted. "That's the worst crime a seaman can commit. They've got it all, and they shall have it; but they'll pay for it to the limit. Go below, woman. I have two bottles of water set by for you. Make it last, for there's no more."

CHAPTER XI

FLENCHER'S ISLAND

TWO days more the calm lasted, and thirst lay like a pall over the *Scorpion*. Gytha tried to smuggle a tiny flask of water to Peter, seeing his distress, but Flencher detected her, and for a breathless instant she really believed he was going to kill her. He had been drinking rum again, and his old enemy was torturing him. She flinched from him as he towered above her, fists raised, eyes redly shining; and suddenly he seemed to fall slack; his hands fell and he turned her by the shoulder, sending her below without a word.

Naka cooked nothing, for there was no water for cooking. From some dark

store under his berth the skipper produced fifty green coconuts on the day after the shooting of Lank, and he divided them, water and pulp, justly among everybody remaining on deck, brown or black or white, ignoring the men in the trade room. He gave no explanation, said nothing as to whether there were more nuts or not; to the now frantic hammerings at door and hatch of the trade room he gave little heed.

Tug's rusty voice shouted the news that the water tank had run dry, and Flencher mocked at it. The men took picks, shovels, tools of every kind, and beat at door and hatch. They were sheathed in steel, and could not be broken down. When the uproar annoyed him, Flencher made Jinks crawl along under the trade room floor and light a smudge of damp sacks sprinkled with pepper, and promised that it would be kept burning as long as they kept hammering. There was no more noise.

"Can't we do something?" Peter asked Maxon. "It's murder to keep those men down there."

"They asked for it," retorted Maxon with a shrug. "So did you, if it comes to that." Maxon seemed to be standing the drought very well, Peter thought. "Any man who steals water at sea is a criminal, sonny. And talking of murder, if you want to see a real one from a front seat, you go and blather your views to Flencher Peruvio."

Even Naka was not smiling the next day. Flencher was haggard and grim. He staggered to the stupendous lurching of the becalmed vessel. Every hour or so, day and night, he came on deck and gazed long at the horizon all around. Going and coming, he stood long before the barometer in the companionway, stooping to the exact level of the vernier, seeking for the slightest change.

Peter found refuge from the heat of the day and the glaring mockery of night with Naka in the galley; and Naka slipped into his hand a six-inch piece of sugar cane, and Peter found ease to his aching throat in chewing the fibrous mass for the juice it gave.

When the moon went down, and the sea lay like oil, Peter fell asleep on deck under the arch of the foresail. Flapping heavily in the still air, jerked back and forth by the vessel's own motion, the canvas made a faint eddy of air. In an hour another dawn would come, another day of searing agony, another day nearer the end that seemed inevitable. From the prone natives, lying scattered about the decks, came little cries of misery. Just before Peter fell asleep, he saw a slim brown shape creep aft, and for a moment thought trouble was brewing. But as he half rose, he saw Maxon step silently from the blackness and meet the brown figure. There was no sound; both slipped out of sight around the house. And presently something plopped into the sea, then silence.

Peter was too drowsy to think much about it. He settled down to sleep. If Maxon wanted to hold nocturnal tryst with one of the natives, that was his affair. If it was a woman, Peter thought it must be a tremendous passion that would live in the distress lying over all like a shroud.

SOMETHING disturbed him. He wriggled impatiently. It was a tiny sound in an uproar of sound, for the ship was never quiet in a calm. This was a different sound. Peter got up with a groan, and looked over the side. There it was again. He peered down into the shimmering water. A bottle bobbed against the white hull. As he looked, a subsidence of the ship sent water over it, and the bottle gurgled and sank. That was that. He could sleep now.

He sought his corner; and the slim brown figure crept back to its own place, passing close to Peter. The last level rays of the sinking moon and the cold direct light of a heaven full of stars made a glow strong enough for him to recognize a young and pretty woman, who had appeared to suffer least of all the natives. Her lips never seemed dry, nor

had she lost much of her gleaming plumpness. Peter went right off to sleep, giving grudging credit to Maxon's taste.

It was through his uneasy dreams that darker thoughts persisted. He had a confused picture of Maxon stealing water in order to keep his brown lass in good condition. The conviction that there was no water left only dragged his thoughts to the inescapable point where Gytha came in. Flencher had said that there were two bottles of water for her, and that was all! Water! Gytha! Peter sprang from the deck, wide awake, and was almost beaten back under a deluge of rain pouring straight as bayonets out of a sky gone inky black.

"Rain!" he howled, and rushed aft. He collided with Flencher emerging from the companionway. "Rain!"

"Rouse out, you slugs, and catch water!" Flencher roared down the stairs. "Naka! Water, you black swine! Can you shift over jib sheets, Peter? Then hop to it!"

Flencher went to the wheel, for a breeze grew out of the rain. Maxon, Jinks and Naka ran to spread awnings on a slant, to set out barrels from which to fill the tanks. Gytha came up, heavy eyed and pale, and lifted her face to the torrent. Brown people scrambled to help, all glistening with cooling rain. The *Scorpion* tossed her head and the sails volleyed; Peter let go all the jib sheets and hauled the sails across the stays as he was ordered; then the vessel paid away, took the wind and leaned to it, raising a murmur at her stem which grew momentarily to a hum, and settled to a roar of music.

Rain! It drummed on the parched decks. It drenched the bleached sails; and when they were sated it poured from them in steaming cataracts under each of which somebody placed a tub or bucket. Rain! Brown men laughed and brown girls sang, and they tossed water over each other until the decks were like a maze of water shafts.

Maxon opened the big tanks, and led the awnings to a great copper funnel to fill them. Peter, inexperienced, drank the first streamlet that poured upon him from the fore staysail. It was salty, for the headsails always got the most sprays and sprays were salt.

He stepped along aft, and was at once ankle deep in the freshest of water, so he drank again, and was amazed to find how much water he could hold. He joined Gytha, and she was laughing, dangerously near to a breakdown. She gripped his arm, and told him it was raining, while her hair lay down her face like paint, and every line of her figure came through her thin dress.

"Just in time, Peter," she said excitedly. "Somebody must have stolen my last bottle of water. I meant to insist on the captain taking charge of it, in case some of the women got to extremity, but—" She stopped, for the day was breaking and in the faint light she realized what the rain was doing to her. She laughed, naturally now, and pulled the plastered silk from her flesh. "I'm so glad, Peter. I've never really believed all the tales of thirst. I do now."

She scooped up another double handful of water and drank it, then she ran below to dry and dress. Peter saw Flencher watch her from the wheel. Those fierce eyes glowed, but it was the glow of a less ferocious passion than man killing now.

All day the rain squalls marched, and the tanks might have been filled ten times over before the torrent ceased. Toward sunset the sky cleared, and the breeze blew strongly. The sun came out, and Flencher took an observation. When it was worked up, he said no word, but his mouth was set in a queer grin that might mean anything. It was noticeable that he did not take any more rum. It was also plain to see that he intended no mercy to the men in the trade room, for he gave them no water, nor did he open the hatch.

Peter wondered why he had them on board at all, if he meant to kill them. But there was no hammering. They

might be dead now. Only by chance did he hit upon the truth. He saw Jinks slyly pass a piece of canvas hose over the lee side while Flencher was working out his sights; and since Jinks also poured two buckets of water into the hose, Peter gathered that the end of the hose must be in some way accessible to the trade room.

He clambered into the fore rigging and on his way glanced down. The hose was thrust in through one of the small portholes in the trade room. Peter climbed aloft, feeling less like a murderer. He meant to go right on up to the royal yard and look around the circle of whitecaps. He might be the first to sight land, and that would be second only to the rain in importance.

When he reached the upper topsail yard, he began to feel giddy. Flencher had come on deck again and was peering aloft. Peter went on, afraid of seeming afraid under that grim eye. He dragged himself up the narrowing rigging, careful of hand and footholds, scarcely daring to use his eyes except to guide his hold; but Flencher shouted at him. He heard no word; the tone was enough. He raised his head and looked ahead.

"Land! It's right over there!" he yelled, and nearly fell from his perch in his excitement. He flung a hand toward a very decided black peak against the twilight sky, and the Flencher shouted to him to hold his arm still while he took the bearing. "It's like a fan upside down, and as big as your sextant!" Peter announced, and clambered smartly down to receive his meed of praise.

FLENCHER gave no praise. He went aloft himself, verified Peter's estimate, and mentally calculated the distance. Once he went below to eat, and he told Gytha to put all her things into her suitcase for safety. When he returned to the deck he made her go with him; and all through the night he made her remain there, while he held the wheel himself and allowed none other to touch it.

"Prepare the boats, Maxon, and let none of the natives leave the deck," he ordered at midnight.

"How about anchors?" Maxon inquired.

"Boats, I said!"

The boats were readied, the brown people huddled together in murmuring groups in the moonlight, sniffing the land. Naka's stove was red hot, and he baked double batches of bread. Jovial Jinks flitted back and forth in a queer sort of nervous ecstasy that puzzled Peter. The island was clearly in view now, and every now and then the moonlight touched with brilliant white the breaking surf at its base and along the reef. Deceiving though the light might be, that land could not be far distant. Sometimes Peter imagined he could hear the boom of breakers. He went forward to listen. The tumbling bow wave deafened him there. He wandered aft, and Flencher saw him.

"Come you here, Peter! Stand by with me. Can you swim?"

"Are we to swim ashore?" Peter grinned.

"Answer me, damn you!" Flencher's voice vibrated with passion, and Peter hastily answered that he swam very well.

"Then stand by Gytha, and don't move!"

Once more the sun came up, and now it painted with gold an island of wonderful beauty. It caught the breath, as the broad day revealed it and the mists of night floated upward, gradually to leave it in dazzling clarity with the white tuft of vapor lingering over the crest until the sun was four handbreadths high. Peter saw Gytha's lips part and her eyes gleam with delight.

Jinks brought food and coffee on deck, and his weazened little face, too, was alight with some emotion. Flencher stood at his wheel like a carven figurehead, only his eyes alive when his powerful hands were still; and he steered with a surprisingly small helm.

He gazed straight ahead. There was a broad break in the white line of the surf, and he steered for it. The boats lay on their chocks, all fasts gone, and their oars laid loose along the thwarts. A silence fell over all; broken only by the now audible thunder of surf and the thrumming of the speeding *Scorpion*.

The reef entrance opened. The brigantine carried full sail. Even Peter knew it was too much. Maxon glanced aft once, then turned away with a brief shrug. When the vessel foamed through the entrance, and spray flew over her, and the noise was deafening, the brown people began to chatter, and Jinks looked over the side with bugging eyes. Gytha's hand sought Peter's and he heard her whispering, but could not catch the words. Still Flencher stood like a post; and if Flencher was as cool as that, it was ill for anybody else to question his acts.

The shore opened out, in a deepwater lagoon as smooth as an inland lake, green blue, and paling to the white of coral sands. Down at one end, where the island ended in a little cliff, there were two jagged black coral teeth, and the water all about them was deep blue. Flencher steered his ship there. Perhaps behind those teeth lay a snugger anchorage.

A seaman could want nothing better than right where she foamed along now, if safety and comfort were sought, yet the *Scorpion*, with the wind whistling through her rigging, and a creaming sea high at her bows, went bowling along, heading straight for the gap between those two coral teeth. When there was no longer room for swinging in safety, Maxon turned with a shout. Peter ran to the rail, with Gytha's hand in his. They too turned to stare at Flencher.

"He'll wreck us!" cried Gytha.

"Flencher, are you mad?" yelled Peter. "Do you mean to drown all hands in the trade room?"

Flencher's face never twitched. Only his eyes burned. Then Maxon ran aft, shouting. Flencher took one hand from the wheel and swept the mate headlong against the rail so that he doubled over it and almost pitched into the sea. In the next moment the *Scorpion* ran between the black fangs, her bows rose with a terrible rasping stagger, and her sides were smashed in against the broken coral. Then her weight bore down, and the rocks crushed through her planking, shattering the step of the foremast, bringing down the mast with all its tangle of yards and stays and its billowing sails, to send all the fifty brown people scuttling aft in terror and overboard into the sunny sea.

Then Flencher left the wheel, picked up Gytha and stirred Peter with his foot.

"This is it. We're home!" He chuckled.

Peter got up and rubbed bruises. Maxon collected himself and swore softly. Up through the companionway darted Jinks, a bag in his hand, and after him poured the crew, never daring to look at Flencher until they reached the rail. Then Bill Blades turned and shook his fist, Jinks squealed something, and all followed the little steward over the side, on to one of the black fangs, and so ashore like a string of scuttling rats.

"What a silly thing to do! How are you going to leave?" cried Gytha, appalled at the mad act.

"Put it out of your pretty head," returned Flencher, and tucked her hand beneath his arm with a chuckle. "Let's go and see if our rooms are ready."

CHAPTER XII

A STRANGE JOURNEY

FLENCHER suddenly turned back to the vessel, leaving Gytha and Peter bewildered.

"We seem to have landed," remarked Peter. "What do you make of it?"

"I ought to laugh, I suppose," she said, "but I feel too scared, Peter. What on earth do you think—?"

Flencher appeared on the tilted deck. He wore a look of almost childish cunning. In his strong hands he twisted a bundle of charts, and as he came toward the shore again he tore the stout paper into bits, tore the bits again, and carefully scattered all upon the sea.

"What about the treasure?" whispered Peter. "What about the jigsaw puzzle chart?"

"Oh, don't be silly!" Gytha exclaimed. "I told you what I thought of that tale!"

Flencher clambered lightly ashore, and Peter faced him.

"Isn't it time you gave us some explanation, Peruvio?"

Flencher grinned, taking Gytha's hand under his arm again. Maxon stood at the bows of the *Scorpion,* looking as if the world had suddenly turned inside out upon him. Not a word had passed between him and his skipper. The crew had fled, and the ship would never see deep water any more, no matter how clever the salvors, how complete their machinery. And the island lay mysterious behind the shore, the broad golden beach fringed with sea grape and oleander; the bush lay dense and still—even the brilliant birds uttered no song.

Of trees there were few, except coconut palms, and a lofty peak rose like a dark green pyramid beyond the bush. Bananas grew wild in pot-holes everywhere, and crabs scuttled across the sands. In the limpid water at the base of the two rocky fangs, crawfish were already returning to their holes. The place might well be a bit of the original creation, disturbed for the first time.

Flencher was tingling with some inner emotion. He looked almost foolishly elated. He met Peter's challenging gaze candidly, and said, with an air of repeating something which had long ago been thoroughly gone over:

"I thought you had understood me, Peter. Tomorrow I shall introduce you to your real work, which is to make this island a fit home for proper people. Gytha has her work, and I'm taking her to look it over now. Meanwhile, you and Maxon will gather the people we brought for the purpose, and unload all the goods from the trade room. You'll find some knockdown huts there. Put 'em up to store the goods in until we build properly. I hold you both responsible for the stores. See that none of those deserting rats—"

"Rats you'd have left to drown!" Peter burst forth.

"Don't be boyish, Peter," Flencher answered without anger. "I knew Jinks would let 'em out. Anyhow, no water was intended to reach the trade room. Did you ever see a prettier piece of docking, Maxon? Cheer up, man! If you're good, I'll make you a gentleman farmer. Come, Gytha."

Peter stared after the whispering bush, closing behind them; then looked at Maxon and found him chuckling.

"The man has actually wrecked us all, purposely, and means to keep us here forever!" said Peter dazedly.

"What of it?" Maxon retorted. "I've known him long enough to be sure of one thing, my lad, and that's the wisdom of watchful waiting where Flencher Peruvio's concerned. Gather those niggers together and let's get busy."

"You're going to submit?" gasped Peter. "You still don't realize—"

"I realize everything. There's been talk of treasure, and I believed it. I still believe it. Jinks made a fumble and the crowd fumbled with him. Flencher's laughing at 'em now, and when they come back they'll come crawling on their hungry bellies. But when Flencher turns up the real clue, Eli Maxon is going to be right in on it." Maxon gripped Peter's arm so that it hurt fiercely. "What else do you think the man would behave so for?"

"Mad!" snapped Peter.

"Mad nothing. Everything he's done proves his sanity. He kept all hands silent in his own fashion, but silent they stayed. Until they cut up and got clapped into custody he never meant to wreck the ship. He did that to stop

any attempt to leave. He let 'em steal his silly puzzle, too. That's no more a chart than the tail of your shirt. Mad? Hell!"

"How's he going to get away?" Peter wanted to know.

"He's got something up his sleeve. You'll see."

"What about Miss Crosbie? He didn't steal her to dig for treasure, and he never wanted me for that either."

Maxon's eyes glittered. He looked long in the direction Flencher and Gytha had taken, and his lips were almost bleeding from the uneasy chewing of his teeth. Then he chuckled.

"Peter, if I believed there was no treasure, he'd never have taken that girl out of sight. I'm rather gone on Gytha. But for a share in loot that's worth Flencher Peruvio's while—well, my son, no girl's worth that much. A pocket full of boodle will buy a sailor any girl he wants.

"He's got his own ideas about her; but she's safe. If he wanted to pull the dirty on her, he'd have done it as soon as he had her on board. That's been his fashion. Flamette wasn't aboard five minutes before she knew all about it. But Flamette was that sort. She expected it. He had her six months. She was to have come this time. Don't ask me why she was given the slip. Jinks dumped her gear ashore after you came aboard. She was on the wharf when we sailed. If Flencher went back to Suva, she'd knife him. But he won't.

"He's got other plans, and I'm sitting in with 'em. Come on, laddie. Watch and pray."

TO BE CONTINUED

Rumblin' John

By HOWARD ELLIS DAVIS

"MY OFFER still stands. I'll give Pete a hundred dollars for that there bull, jest for the pleasure of turnin' his carcass into beef an' nailin' his hide to my barn do'."

Having thus in no uncertain terms declared himself, old Hanse Rountree arose from his chair and threw another log into the four-foot fireplace. Flames leaped upward, roaring and crackling into the wide throat of the chimney. The ruddy light, the only illumination in the room, danced merrily over the log walls, chinked with mud.

One corner of the room was occupied by a double bed, covered with a crazy quilt of many bright colors; on the rough plank floor were rugs of goatskin; two pairs of boots and heavy yarn socks steamed in the heat of the fire. Against the rived board shingles of the roof the Winter rain drummed steadily.

Standing with his hands behind him, Hanse scowled down at his grandson, Tom, who sprawled in a chair, legs outstretched, toasting the soles of his feet. Tom grinned up at the old man.

"I don't believe you'd do anything to Rumblin' John if Pete sold him to you," he said.

"An' why wouldn't I?"

"Because we couldn't spare him. Even if he is a grade, there's no finer bull in south Alabama. He's been king of this range for years and years. You have too much respect for him."

"Waal, he ain't got no respect for me," Hanse declared.

"That's because you won't make allowances for his fiery temper and give him a wide berth, like the rest of us do."

"Didn't he once keep me settin' in the branches of a tree for half a day, till he got darned good an' ready to walk off

an' let me come down? An' last Fall, when we had the cattle penned ready to put 'em over on Tupelo Island in the river for the Winter, didn't he chase me out the pen an' nigh kill me? Butted me off the fence, 'fo' I could git over. Tore my britches, tore my shirt, landed me on my head an' plum driv' my neck into my backbone. Why, ef I hadn't been sich a good runner an' beat him across the pen, he'd have gored me an' trompled me out of shape. An' you fools standin' around laughin' like it was a good joke. Yes-sir! My offer of a hundred dollars stands."

Tom laughed aloud at the recollection, and presently a reluctant grin overspread the old man's face.

In spite of his almost seventy years, Hanse was a mighty man, and known as such among all his neighbors. Cleanshaven, a thick mane of gray hair brushed back from his forehead, he stood six feet three on his bare feet. Tom, a youth of twenty-two, was as tall and broad as his grandfather, but had not yet developed into as heavy a man. Having studied animal husbandry at the State school at Auburn, he had cast his lot with the lonesome old man in his logging and cattle business, and the two of them lived in the cabin on the ridge overlooking the river swamp.

Hanse was restless. Padding on bare feet to the door, he stood looking out into the night.

"The rain is slackin' up an' it's gittin' colder," he said when he returned to the fire. "But ef it's been rainin' up the river like it has here, it'll be risin' fast. We may have to take them cattle off the island."

Tom was tired after a hard day with Hanse on Pinto Creek, getting logs into the creek, preparatory to floating them out on the rise. He was comfortable in dry clothes after a hearty supper. Presently, there in his chair, he went to sleep.

When he was awakened by the booming voice of Hanse from the doorway, his limbs were cramped and the fire had burned low. The old man was splashed with mud and wet to his waist.

"Git yo' boots on, Tom. I've been down to the river an' it's risin' fast. Tupelo Island will be flooded in another twenty-fo' hours, maybe sooner. We got to git them cattle off. We'll use Pete's outboard motor on the bateau to tow the flat. Shake a leg, now! I've saddled the hosses. We'll have to hurry. Ef we can't cross Shoal Creek at the bridge, we'll have to go round, an' that'll take us hours longer."

Outside, the rain had ceased, but a cutting wind blew out of the north. In the darkness Tom found his mare, Trilby, tied to a post of the little porch. Swinging into the saddles, they galloped down the hill, boot to boot, and entered the swamp road.

Beneath the spread of giant gum trees, the swamp was shrouded in a black Winter silence; no frogs screeched, no night birds called. Only the sound of the galloping horses—a continual splash in the soft earth or through pools standing in the road.

A small stream had spread for many yards beyond its banks and was belly deep. At another ford the branch had been dammed by the rising waters of Shoal Creek, of which it formed a tributary, and the horses were swimming before they were across.

Reins slack on the mare's neck, stirrup rubbing stirrup of the man beside him, Tom experienced no sense of progress. The darkness was so intense that he could form no idea of where they were on the road. But as the horses splashed knee deep into running water, Hanse, breaking the silence for the first time, said:

"Whoa! This here is Shoal Creek. Git down, Tom, an' lead the mare. It's hard to tell in the dark jest when we'll reach the bridge, an' we don't want to stumble upon it unbeknownst. The stringers are cabled; but some of the flo' may be washed out. You drap behind. I'll go first."

The water gradually deepened until it was up to Tom's armpits. The mare was swimming. With difficulty he braced himself against the current. The gurgling, swishing black water seemed a limitless sea. If he missed his footing and was swept from the road, he would be lost in the churning current. He could see or hear nothing in front of him.

Presently he felt the planking beneath his feet. The bridge arched upward and the water dropped to his waist. The floor still held securely, no yawning hole through which a horse might have stepped and broken a leg.

A MILE farther on they turned from the river road and climbed a ridge. At Sol Dorgan's house they pounded at the door and called until Sol appeared.

"Come on over to Pete's place, Sol," Hanse told him. "The river's gittin' up where it will soon flood Tupelo Island. We got to git them cattle off."

Part of the cattle on the island belonged to Sol. Each Autumn, he and Hanse and Pete Rivers gathered those herds which ranged the hills where, in Winter, the grass became sparse and the cattle grew thin from insufficient nutriment and, if not hand fed, some of them even died of starvation. Tupelo Island, several miles long by half a mile wide, was well covered by mutton cane, green and succulent throughout the Winter. The cattle were taken over on a flat and left until the grass on the hill range had put out the following Spring.

Occasionally, following excessively heavy rains up the river, Tupelo Island was flooded. Watching the river, the cattlemen always removed their herds in time to save them. These floods usually occurred in the late Winter, and the cattle, when they had again sifted out to the hills, were fat and strong enough to carry themselves through. It had been five years, two years before Tom had come to live with Hanse, since Tupelo Island had been flooded.

Pete lived in a frame house on a hill two miles from the river. They were greeted by the deep, mellow bay of a hound. From the kitchen window streamed the yellow glow of a kerosene lamp. As they rode into the back yard and dismounted, Pete came to the door and stood silhouetted in the light behind him—a tall, thin man with rounded shoulders and a drooping, sandy mustache.

"That you, Hanse?" he called. "Figgered you an' Tom would be along 'gin daylight. I set on the river bank till an hour ago. She's plum bilin'. Come in; come in."

Pete's wife, in a red woolen wrapper, was busily engaged about the small cookstove, which was red hot, sending out a grateful wave of heat to the wet men. A big pot of coffee simmered on the back of the stove. An alarm clock on a shelf showed that it was almost three o'clock. Sol came in before they had finished the generous breakfast Mrs. Rivers set before them.

When Hanse had again mounted, two of them lifted up the eight-horsepower outboard motor. It was an awkward burden; but the powerful old man carried it with ease, balanced on his saddle horn. Pete took the five-gallon tin of gasoline.

A road led straight down the hill and through the swamp to the river. Part of the swamp was already flooded; but in no place was the water swimming deep to the horses. Bordering the river was a long oak ridge, considerably higher than the swamp and never known to have been flooded. The bank of the river was still ten or twelve feet above the flood, and steep, except at the end of the road, where there was a gradual slope to the water's edge. Here the flat was moored. A square ended bateau was lying bottom upward on the bank, its chain wound about a tree and fastened with a padlock.

Having put the bateau into the water, they set the outboard motor in place and filled it with gasoline. Then the

small boat was lashed securely to the side of the flat, near one end.

Hanse stood looking up into the faint gray light that had begun to break over the river.

"Reck'n we better git started," he said. "It'll push us to float them critters all out today."

"Lot of them will have to be rounded up, too," Tom said, as a belated thought occurred to him. "We ought to have brought the dogs."

"Won't have to bother 'bout that," Hanse assured him. "They'll be waitin' for us. An' don't you fellers forgit to cut you some sticks to keep 'em minded back off the flat."

Following the example of the others, Tom cut himself a limber pole about the size of a fishing rod.

Seating himself in the bateau, Pete started the motor. The flat was headed almost directly upstream, and soon the necessity of this became apparent; for here the current swept down like a mill-race. Although the powerful little motor was giving of its best, they made no progress against the current. Tom could see by the bank they were leaving that, under Pete's skilful manipulation, they were simply edging straight out across the stream.

When halfway to the island, they could hear the cattle giving noisy evidence that they were aware of the danger which threatened them. Cows lowed incessantly; yearlings bawled with a note of terror. Now and then came the shrill call of a young bull. Through the medley of other sounds there was a deep, low monotone, almost like the mutter of distant thunder—the voice of Rumblin' John.

Still headed almost directly upstream, they were now in the middle of the river. The surface of the yellow water was covered with drift—leaves, small branches, churning logs. Appearing suddenly out of the gloom, a forest monarch, which had fallen into the stream with a caving bank, its root system spread at one end, its sweeping branches at the other, bore directly down upon them.

From the bottom of the flat, Hanse seized a long, stout pole with a spike at one end and poised himself in the bow. Tom and Sol ranged themselves behind him. Pete slowed down the motor. With a skilful thrust, Hanse fastened the spike in the trunk of the tree and the three men put forth their united efforts. Slowly it was forced by, its branches rasping alarmingly along the sides and bottom of the flat. The staccato exhaust of the motor again resounded, and they continued their course, having been forced a hundred yards downstream.

But the current was becoming less swift. A projecting point of the island formed a small bay, and here the water eddied.

Pete turned the flat and headed straight in to the landing.

Tom could now see the cattle near the water's edge, milling restlessly, heads tossing, bawling. They were, as Hanse had predicted, awaiting their rescuers. Many of the old cows had been transported back and forth on the flat for years and looked upon it as their only means of escape.

Rumblin' John swam the river whenever he pleased. Tom could see him now, standing back and a little at one side on a small rise of ground, surveying his frightened herd, as if he disdained to crowd in among the lesser cattle seeking rescue. Fawn-colored along the sides, his belly was white, and there was a white stripe across his withers. His face was dark, and shaggy between wideset, choleric eyes. His horns were short and curved inward, like those of a Jersey.

With the limber stick he had cut, Hanse took his place in the bow of the flat, with Sol and Tom on either side of him.

"Ef they rushes us," he warned Tom, "you'll have to hop in the bateau in a hurry. They'll sink the flat in no time."

AS THE square nose of the scow grounded, there was a general movement forward among the cattle. Gingerly, the foremost began making their way out on the flat. Some of those behind began to crowd, and the sticks of the three men resounded as they whacked them between the horns, checking their haste.

The space on the flat was filling in an orderly manner and they almost had their first load, when a white faced cow some distance back in the herd, as if suddenly seized with the terror of being left behind, plunged madly forward, bawling loudly.

Demoralization quickly spread. The cattle in front of the cow crowded forward; those behind followed her mad rush. The entire herd seemed determined to push their way on to the flat at once. Furiously the men fought with their sticks, trying to hold them back. Then Hanse called—

"Into the bateau, quick!"

Instead of sifting out through the quieter cattle, already on the flat, Tom ran for the side, colliding with a young steer which had just leaped on to the flat.

Before he could recover himself, he was pressed in among the charging cattle, forced out toward the center of the flat. The pressure between the trampling animals became so great that it seemed as if his ribs would cave in. He heard the rail at the other end of the flat crack loudly as the stout planking gave way. Following its collapse, some of the cattle were forced overboard.

Then he was in the water, amid a sea of tossing horns and wide, staring eyes, white with terror. The flat had been literally trodden beneath the surface, had filled and sunk.

Presently, above the bawling of the swimming cattle, he heard an encouraging shout and saw Hanse in the bow of the bateau, powerfully wielding a paddle, while Sol and Pete fought off the cattle that tried to climb aboard the frail craft. Grasping Tom by the arms, Hanse dragged him into the bateau.

When they had fought their way clear, Tom saw that all the cattle were now in the eddy water of the little bay, swimming aimlessly about in circles—all except Rumblin' John, who stood on the bank, gazing upon the scene. His deep, throaty bellow seemed to express his distress at the mad folly of his terrified herd.

While they paused, as Pete started the motor, a section of the cattle, following the lead of an old cow, detached itself from the others and swam toward the bateau.

"Let the motor be," Hanse said. "We'll paddle. Maybe by keepin' jest ahead of them, we can tole 'em across."

"That's dangerous business," Pete declared. "Ef a critter gits close enough, it'll try to climb in an' will sink us."

"You see that they don't climb in," Hanse told him laconically. "Tom, take that other paddle an' git in the bow."

When they had left the eddy water of the little bay, they pointed the bateau diagonally upstream, in order to offset the force of the current. The detachment of cattle swimming after them followed steadily. In midstream, a yearling that had been thrashing madly with its forefeet, instead of swimming low, as the others were doing, became exhausted and finally sank beneath the yellow flood. A dun cow, electing to swim straight across, was swept below the landing and went off downstream.

Still holding the bow of their craft upstream, they edged in to the landing and grounded. With instinctive skill, the cattle followed and sloshed out, their sides heaving after the hard pull against the current. They continued on up the ridge and sifted out among the trees, as if determined to get out of sight of the river.

"Why don't they get back on the island?" Tom asked as he gazed out across the river at the remainder of the herd.

"They're plumb confused," Pete told

him mournfully. "They'll swim 'round in circles till they drown. Ef it wasn't for the eddy water, they'd have been swept on down the river. I've seen a whole bunch carried off an' lost that way in years gone by.

"But look!" he continued. "Some of 'em are goin' to try to make it across. There's a critter out ahead of 'em." He shaded his eyes with his hand in the light of the rising sun, now breaking through a bank of clouds. "I believe it's Rumblin' John."

Presently Tom could see distinctly the massive dark head of the bull. Cannily, he was heading upstream, fighting the current, edging gradually across. Swimming close together, a bunch of the other cattle were following him.

AT THE landing, where the bottom sloped gradually, the bull came out with a rush. Then, rumbling to himself, he turned and stood gazing while the other cattle dragged themselves from the river. Only two of the most exhausted failed to gain a foothold and were carried on to their doom by the current.

The men edged off to one side; for they knew that at any moment the bull might charge them. But Hanse, as always refusing to acknowledge fear of either man or beast, walked out into the road and said—

"I'm going back in the bateau after another bunch of them critters."

"Don't," Pete pleaded. "They're liable to capsize you, Hanse."

But the old man unfastened the motor and laid it out on the bank, then seated himself in the stern, paddle in hand. Tom shoved off the bateau and stepped in.

Crossing safely, they started back, with a detachment of the cattle again following them. Halfway, they met Rumblin' John, returning to his herd. Foolishly, three of the cattle turned and swam after the bull.

Most of the cattle following the bateau were swimming in a bunch. But an old cow with spreading horns had forged ahead. Once she drew uncomfortably close to the boat, when Hanse turned and threateningly flourished his paddle.

It happened when they were within a hundred yards of the bank, carefully gaging their position so that, with the cattle following them, they would ground at the landing. Shouts of warning from Pete and Sol came too late. Tom, kneeling in the bow, felt himself lifted into the air. Then he was in the water. The cow, again reaching the bateau, had reared herself and hooked one foreleg over the stern.

When, half strangled, he came to the surface, he heard his grandfather's voice close beside him,

"Steady, son. Keep headin' upstream. We'll make it all right."

Swimming side by side, with powerful strokes they battled against the current. The boat was lost, the cattle were all about them. Tom felt there was little hope of reaching the landing.

Turning his head, Hanse smiled at him, and Tom was ashamed of his own terror. He felt that as long as his grandfather was with him, shoulder to shoulder, anything was possible. His efforts became less frantic. Letting his body sink lower into the water, the drag of his clothing and boots became less heavy. Presently, through white lips, he smiled back at Hanse; and almost before he knew it, he was standing waist deep at the landing, splashed by the floundering cattle.

Weak and trembling, Tom lay beside Hanse on the ground and watched Rumblin' John bring in another detachment of the herd. Only a yearling, which had fallen behind the others, was swept by on the current and lost. A third time the bull swam back to the island, and they anxiously awaited his return; for they knew that the long hours of struggle against the flood were gradually exhausting his strength.

When at last he dragged himself out at the landing, he stood with nostrils

distended, sides heaving. His flanks had fallen in, as if from long fasting. He was gaunt and drawn.

For awhile he stood there just above the water, head drooping, then slowly turned and gazed out across the river.

"Ain't but a few of 'em left, old-timer," Hanse said. "Let 'em go. You've saved most of the herd, an' you couldn't make it over there an' back another time. Go on up the ridge an' take yo' rest."

As if he understood, Rumblin' John turned his head and gazed up at the sanctuary of the ridge. But once more he looked back across the river, to that small remnant of his herd still swimming in the eddy water near the island. He began to mutter deep in his throat. Then, once more, he started for the river.

In spite of a warning cry from the others, Hanse leaped into the road in front of Rumblin' John, shouting at him:

"You ain't a-goin' in that river no mo' an' drown yo'self, you blasted fool! Ain't you got sense enough to know—"

Lowering his head, the bull charged, struck him, knocked him down, ran completely over him. Without pausing, the animal continued on into the water and was soon swimming strongly against the current.

Hanse had had the presence of mind to throw himself backward, when he saw that he could not avoid the impact, so there was no great shock; but Rumblin' John had stepped on his leg, tearing open the cloth of his trousers from the knee upward, painfully rasping the skin. Rising slowly upon his feet, he shook his fist and hurled a string of profanity at the massive dark head on the surface of the muddy flood. As always in these encounters with the bull, it was the upsetting of his dignity that infuriated the old man.

"I'll pay you a hundred dollars for him an' shoot his damned carcass full of holes!" he shouted at Pete. "I'll shoot him first, then pay you for him! Dad-blamed-dee-daddled-damn! I'm a-goin' to shoot him! Do you hear me, Pete! I'm a-goin' to shoot that there bull, ef it's the last act of my life!"

"Ain't no use talkin' of shootin' Rumblin' John, Hanse," Pete said reproachfully. "You know well enough he'll never make it back. He'll be drowned in the river."

Hanse looked down at the flapping cloth of his trouser leg, and with his fingertips gingerly touched the rasped skin of his thigh.

"Then let him drown. I'll set here on the bank an' enjoy watchin' it. Tom, git a stick an' scrape some of this here mud off me."

But presently Hanse joined the others who, in silence, were watching this last noble effort of Rumblin' John. It took him much longer than previously to reach the other side. They saw him, his head in the distance only a dark spot on the water, swim about among the cattle until they began to follow him. They saw him start, then turn back, as two timid creatures refused to leave the eddy water. As he again started, one of them still remained, to continue swimming in a circle until exhausted, then to sink and drown.

They watched him as he breasted the current, the other cattle in a bunch behind him. In midstream, they saw a great log strike one of the creatures end on, saw the animal sink, then go off down the river, rolling over and over.

SUDDENLY Hanse leaped to his feet and strained eagerly forward.

"He's weakenin'," he said. "He can't keep out ahead of the others."

Gradually the gap between Rumblin' John and the cattle swimming behind him was closing. Presently he was among them. The men anxiously watched for the dark head, to see if it were still above the surface. Then they saw it appear behind the other cattle.

He was too wise to head directly across the stream; but he was just hold-

ing his own, making little progress toward the bank. He had been left far behind by the other cattle, and most of them presently came splashing out at the landing. Four were swept by.

Hanse got a rope from his saddle. Adjusting the noose, he waded out until he was waist deep in the water and stood with the coil ready in his hand. In spite of his efforts, the current was now bearing Rumblin' John slowly backward. When almost opposite the landing, he turned and headed directly in. Broadside to the current, he was carried rapidly downstream.

Tom never forgot Rumblin' John's eyes as he made that last great hopeless effort. They were fierce eyes, fighting eyes, the eyes of one who would never give up. Though Hanse waded out until the water was up to his armpits, with the others there close behind to lend assistance, the cast of his rope fell short.

A cry of dismay went up from the others; but the determined old man hastily splashed out of the water. Gaining the ridge, he ran off along the high bank of the river. Beneath him, Rumblin' John was again making a desperate effort to breast the current. Because of overhanging trees, it was impossible to cast the rope.

Crashing through the undergrowth, Hanse got below him, reached a wild pecan tree that grew from the high bank, its trunk parallel with the water, its foremost branches now trailing in the swollen stream. With squirrel-like agility, he climbed out upon it as far as he could go and crouched there, waiting.

Tom had picked up the rope and followed him along the bank. When he now saw what the old man had in mind to do, his heart almost stopped in apprehension. Slowly the great head of the bull was drifting nearer, its position shifting toward the bank or farther out, as the vagaries of the current directed. Though he dreaded it, Tom muttered a prayer that it would pass within reach of old Hanse's powerful arm.

It was now among the trailing branches of the pecan tree. Holding to a limb with one hand, Hanse stretched out his arm—missed by inches grasping a short, curved horn. Rumblin' John drifted below him.

Rising to his feet, Hanse stood for a moment poised on the trunk of the pecan tree, then dived headlong into the river. A few powerful strokes brought him up with the bull. Grasping him by the horn, he began tugging, tugging, drawing him nearer the high bank, from which titi bushes trailed into the water.

The first of these which he grasped with his free hand yielded only small twigs and leaves, stripping through his fingers. As he and Rumblin' John passed beneath the next, he reached up and caught its trunk, the size of his wrist.

Tom and Pete and Sol were standing on the bank directly above them. As the swift current tugged at the great body of the exhausted bull, Tom saw his grandfather's arms stretch and stretch, as if he literally would be pulled apart. But the small tree was pliant, and Rumblin' John had never given up. He was still fighting against the current, and this somewhat eased the strain.

After taking a twist with the end of the rope about a tree, Tom gave it to Sol and Pete to hold, then slipped down into the river. He fastened the other end about Rumblin' John's horns. Quickly he climbed out again, and in a moment Hanse came up behind him, hand over hand along the rope, his feet braced against the bank.

To Tom the situation seemed hopeless. It is true they could keep the bull afloat indefinitely with the rope; but how were they to get him up the twelve foot bank, which here was almost perpendicular.

"We'll ease him along downstream," Hanse said. "There's a creek comes in two hundred yards below here. It will be backed up by the river. We can git him up that to a place where the bank is slopin'."

At last, with the four of them tugging at the rope, Rumblin' John came on trembling legs out of the eddy water of the creek, on to the high ground of the ridge. For a moment he stood bracing himself; then he slowly sank to the earth and turned on his side. His eyes rolled back in his head; spasm after spasm of chill and exhaustion shook the great frame.

"He's a gone gobbler," Pete said, shaking his head. "Ain't never seen a critter in that fix what got up again."

But already, with the heel of his heavy boot, Hanse was kicking the splinters from a fat pine stump. With driftwood, they made a fire on either side of the bull.

For an hour they squatted about, watching him. And now only by the throbbing of his side and an occasional tremor could they tell that Rumblin' John was alive. Evening was drawing near, and they had eaten nothing all day. Again Pete voiced his hopelessness:

"He'll soon be gone. Ain't no use in settin' here to watch him die. Let's go to the house."

"Go to the house and git some bedclothes," Hanse told him. "We'll kiver him up an' try to keep the body heat in. I'll stay here an' mind the fire."

He made Tom go with the others, and it was night when they returned with a bundle of blankets and quilts—and a pan of food and a pot of coffee for Hanse, which Tom set to heat among the coals of the fire.

Nor would Hanse return with them to Pete's house for the night.

"He ain't dead yit," he said, "an' it's my belief he's jest too o'nery an' mean to die. It won't be my fault ef he does. Tom, dad-rat yo' hide, ef you say again you're going to stay with me, I'll take a stick an' run you out the swamp. Git on with you now."

And so, Rumblin' John covered with bedclothes, the two fires going steadily, their ruddy light reflected in the treetops overhead, they left old Hanse to his lonely vigil. At dawn, they returned to the swamp. Fastening their horses, they walked down the ridge toward the place where they had left Hanse and Rumblin' John.

"Don't see why he didn't show up at the house," Pete said anxiously. "That there bull didn't last an hour after we left. He was almost gone. Hanse is so blamed butt-headed, though, he—"

"What's that?" Sol interrupted him, stopping to listen.

From down the ridge came a deep, throaty bellow—the voice of Rumblin' John. Cautiously they proceeded, and when they were near the place, they held themselves back amid the undergrowth and peered through.

Restlessly pawing the earth, Rumblin' John stood alone. Bedclothes were scattered in every direction. The ashes of the dead fires were trampled into the earth.

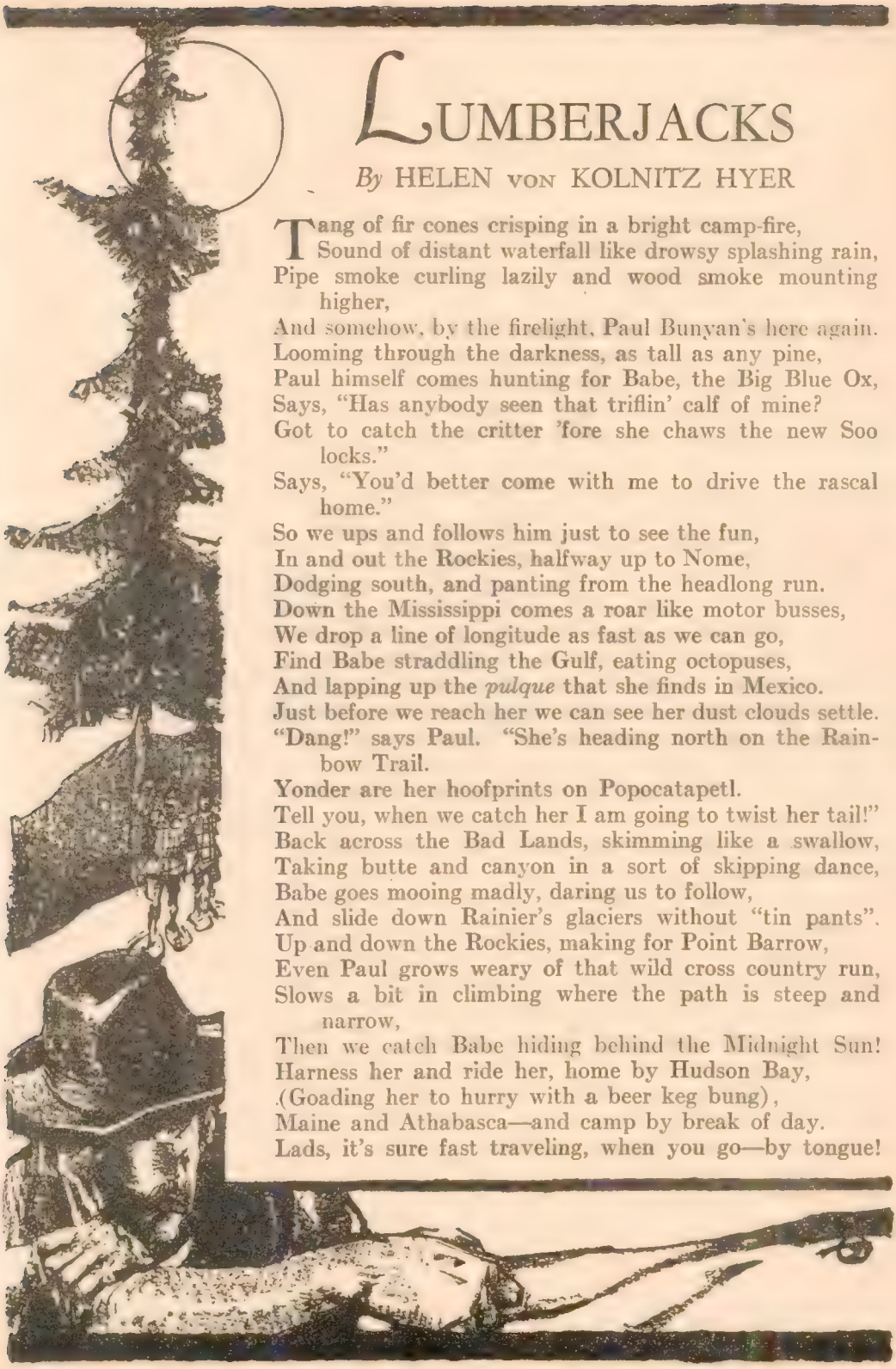
"Gran'pa!" called Tom fearfully.

"Here I am," came Hanse's voice from the thick branches of a holly tree. "Been a-settin' here since 'fo' daylight. First thing he done when he got on his feet was chase me up a tree. I'm a-goin' to shoot him, Pete. I'm a-goin' to git my repeatin' rifle an' shoot that there dad-blamed bull so full of holes his hide won't be fittin' to make lace strings."

Gathering some of the scattered herd together, they drove them beneath the holly tree and Rumblin' John, with many a backward glance, went off with them, grumbling throatily to himself.

"That there red bed quilt started it," Hanse said, when he at last stood on the ground. "When he riz to his feet an' the quilt slid off him, he got in a temper an' began hookin' it. Of course I taken it away from him. Then he got after me. Ef I hadn't been sich a good runner—I'll pay you the hundred dollars, Pete; but I'm a-goin' to shoot him first, ef it's the last act of my life."

"Shorely, shorely, Hanse, you wouldn't do that," Pete said, a note of anxiety in his voice. But behind the old man's back he grinned and winked at Tom.



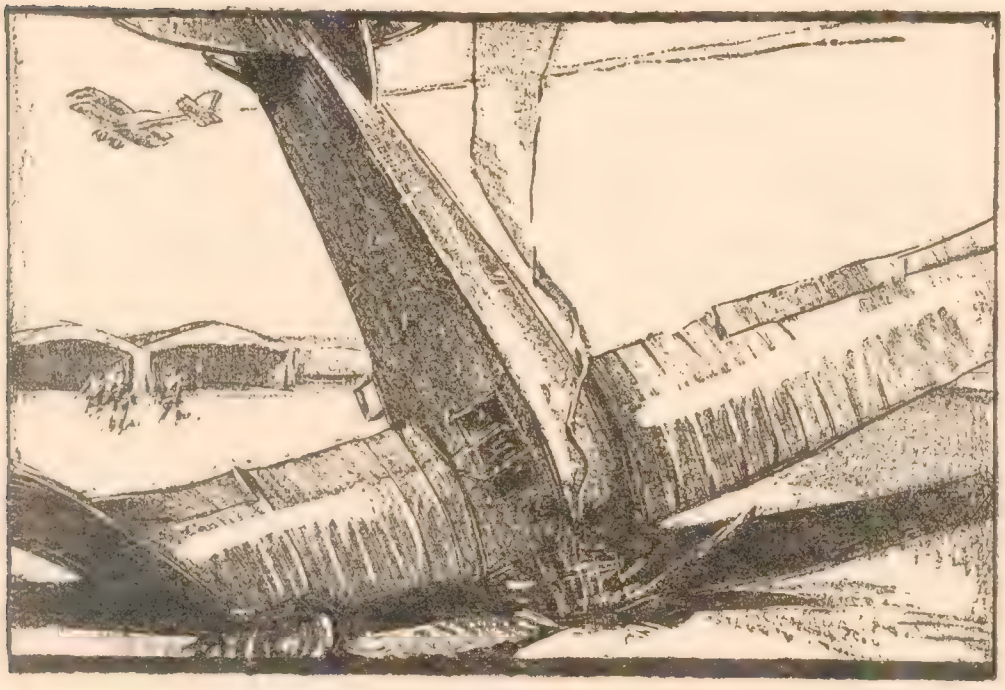
LUMBERJACKS

By HELEN VON KOLNITZ HYER

Tang of fir cones crisping in a bright camp-fire,
Sound of distant waterfall like drowsy splashing rain,
Pipe smoke curling lazily and wood smoke mounting higher,
And somehow, by the firelight, Paul Bunyan's here again.
Looming through the darkness, as tall as any pine,
Paul himself comes hunting for Babe, the Big Blue Ox,
Says, "Has anybody seen that triflin' calf of mine?
Got to catch the critter 'fore she chaws the new Soo locks."
Says, "You'd better come with me to drive the rascal home."
So we ups and follows him just to see the fun,
In and out the Rockies, halfway up to Nome,
Dodging south, and panting from the headlong run.
Down the Mississippi comes a roar like motor busses,
We drop a line of longitude as fast as we can go,
Find Babe straddling the Gulf, eating octopuses,
And lapping up the *pulque* that she finds in Mexico.
Just before we reach her we can see her dust clouds settle.
"Dang!" says Paul. "She's heading north on the Rainbow Trail.
Yonder are her hoofprints on Popocatapetl.
Tell you, when we catch her I am going to twist her tail!"
Back across the Bad Lands, skimming like a swallow,
Taking butte and canyon in a sort of skipping dance,
Babe goes mooing madly, daring us to follow,
And slide down Rainier's glaciers without "tin pants".
Up and down the Rockies, making for Point Barrow,
Even Paul grows weary of that wild cross country run,
Slows a bit in climbing where the path is steep and narrow,
Then we catch Babe hiding behind the Midnight Sun!
Harness her and ride her, home by Hudson Bay,
(Goading her to hurry with a beer keg bung),
Maine and Athabasca—and camp by break of day.
Lads, it's sure fast traveling, when you go—by tongue!

By ANDREW A. CAFFREY

The TIN SHIP



IT WAS high noon at Web Field. The hot Florida sun was also high. And Flying Cadet Booth Delano—he of the dashing Denver Delanos—was in very high spirits. He had a right to be. The wild cadet had just been restored to flying status. Yes, sir, fortune and the post adjutant, Captain High Pockets Merritt, had called Delano to come and stand on the adjutant's carpet and be told. Then High Pockets, forcing one of those patronizing, cast iron smiles of his, informed Cadet Delano that the commanding officer was about to give him another chance to prove that he—Delano—was worthy of trust and could be treated in a military manner, as befits a future officer and gentleman.

"But," Adjutant High Pockets Merritt added, "Major Dodson will brook no further infringement of flying rules. Get that, and get it straight, Delano."

The cast iron smile of semi-official unction had passed, and High Pockets was again recalling that this man on the carpet had caused him and the C.O. much grief and humiliation. The wild Delano had a way of getting into trouble. That, for a cadet, is only natural. But Cadet Delano had another way about him—a way of getting out of trouble. And this ability was very unnatural. What's more—and this was the rub that rubbed High Pockets and Major Dodson the wrong way—Cadet Delano could always get out of trouble in such a manner as to leave the commanding officer and adjutant holding the sack and looking very foolish. They didn't like that.

Cadet Delano was standing there before High Pockets Merritt's desk in a very military manner when Major Dumb Dodo Dodson came into that room from his own office.

"What—Delano!" Major Dumb Dodo barked. "Ah, yes. Yes, we wanted to see you, Cadet. Going to put you back on flying status and all that. Has Captain Merritt told you? Well, well—now lookahere, Delano. Now I want you to go back flying and keep your nose clean. You can do it. You're a good pilot, Delano, and I want to see you act like a soldier. I shouldn't give you this new chance, but we don't like to keep any man on the ground. Y'understand, Delano?"

"Yes, sir," Cadet Delano answered, without laughing, and his voice was almost as "yes-yes" as High Pockets' best yes-yessing voice.

Major Dodo Dodson was feeling pretty good, benevolent. He paced the office floor a bit, then spoke again.

"Delano—" he now said, and you just knew that the major was going to spread the old friendship stuff thick— "Delano, I'm giving you this new chance as a reward for what you did at the gymkhana day before yesterday. You were the only Web Field man worth a damn."

You could 'a' knocked Delano loose from his standing on that carpet with a humming bird's feather. The gymkhana referred to was the annual field day held between Web Field and the soldiers from Fort Dade, another Florida post. Day before yesterday the Dade gang had come down on Web Field like a swarm of gnats. The whole danged command had come over from Dade. And the wild Daders had cleaned up every field event. Then they took the final baseball game, final in a series of five that had been played over a stretch of three months.

And to top it off, those Daders had romped away with the boxing and wrestling bouts, held in the gymnasium that night. Only one bout came Web's way. That win was Cadet Delano's. He had stayed for the full distance—four fast rounds—with Dade's best middleweight. Then, mixing the final shower of blows with the final gong, Cadet Delano had put Dade's best and bravest away. But that one win wasn't much to show for a whole day's work; and the Web Field men were pretty well down in the mouth. Not so for the Fort Dade throng.

Now that one day of gymkhana, whether held at Web or at Dade, was more or less a free day. If you say that there was a little of the wet goods consumed, well, you don't malign the service in the least. You've got to get some spirit into a thing like that. And with the spirit moving, and no taps or other calls during the day and night, that Dade gang certainly did their stuff after the last scheduled event was off the card. They just about took Web Field apart. But Major Dodo Dodson and High Pockets Merritt didn't mind that—at the time—for they were in the hands of a group of Dade officers who were acting like enlisted stiffs.

So much for that day, however. Enough to say that Cadet Delano had won his bout. And now, as a reward for valor, he was being commended by his C.O.

"Yes, Cadet," Major Dodson remarked again, as he now recalled that awful day and night, "you were the only Web Field man worth a good—" and right then and there, as High Pockets had done, the major remembered that this man on the carpet was hot stuff. "But, Delano—hear me!—you'll keep your nose clean this time, see? No more pink goats! No more wrecking ships in lagoons! No more of this monkey business. Y'hear that, Delano! . . . All right. Now you can go. Report to flying office for class, and watch your step."

Walking on air, Cadet Delano went out of that office. As he stood on the front steps of headquarters, facing the flying field where ships were landing and taxiing in to the deadline, the very sweetest of all bugle calls, mess call,

sounded through the camp. He went toward the cadets' mess with a skip and a jump, plus a song in his heart and a rose in his teeth. One cadet was happy.

"Airmen," he bellowed, upon reaching the mess hall, "dig up that fatted calf and kill the brute. An order from the White House has put me back to work. Yea, bo! God's gift to clouddom goes back on the wing today. The C.O. just called me in, and says he to me says he, 'Cadet Delano, we can't get along without you. We've tried, and we've failed. The rest of these so-and-so flying cadets ain't worth a hoot in hell. Report for flying duty. Fly anything you want, anywhere, any time, and in your own inimitable manner. But don't crash more than one ship per period, and take care of your neck. How are you fixed for cash, and do you want a few days off in town?' Yes, sir, men, them's the major's exact words—with slight variations."

"That isn't the way I heard it at all, Delano," said Cadet Acrid Akerly, a little liked boy with a visage and disposition that were going to fit fine with dyspepsia in later life. "High Pockets was in flying office not more than an hour ago. He told them to put you back on status, rush the thing, and get you to hell and gone through the course. Away from the field. You're not so hot."

"No such damned lie, Acrid!" Delano replied; but he knew that Acrid Akerly had stated the case in its exact, raw cross section.

Delano wasn't kidding Delano, not for a minute; and he knew enough to know that Dumb Dodo and the adjutant were doing all in their power to patronize and speed him on his way. Delano had no objections to the plan. Kelly Field, San Antonio, and its advance flying would come after the move. That was the bright goal of all flying cadets.

"No, you're all wrong, Acrid," Delano continued. "Tell you how I figure the thing. It's this way: The C.O. and High Pockets want a good pilot to handle the Junkers ship. That's it. I tell you, Acrid, they pampered me. They used big words on me—'infringement', 'will brook', etc.—then patted me on the back, clubby, and wanted to know if I had any good Arcadia and Fort Myers telephone numbers. Take it from me, Acrid, I'm a made man. I'm the white haired boy on this post. I'm—"

"Yeah?" Cadet Akerly crabbed. "You're like an East Coast twister: here today and gone tomorrow. If you had the sense that God gave little green apples, you'd pipe down and knock on wood."

"One swell idea, Acrid," Cadet Delano agreed. "Thanks. I'll sure knock on wood, and right now. Whango!"

FLYING office assigned a ship to Delano for the two o'clock period. Being an advanced student, with his first solo far behind him, Delano was to go up for acrobatics. Flying solo, of course. It was his first hop in more than two weeks, and great things were being promised—to Delano by Delano. At 2:05 he took the air. His was the first bus off the ground. And Lieutenant Peel, in charge of acrobatics, stood there watching, speculating, waiting. Delano again!

During the first hour of flight Cadet Delano did all the things of which a Curtiss JN6H was capable. He worked at elevations between three and five thousand feet, very proper, safe and rule abiding. He had a right to feel proud of himself; and he even hoped that the major or High Pockets might come out to the deadline, gaze aloft and observe the model cadet in model action. However, shortly after three o'clock Cadet Delano spotted something on the ground that held his attention.

He was some four or five miles north of Web Field at the time. The something on the ground was two men who waved in a frantic, anxious manner. Those waving men appeared to be soldiers, Web Field variety, and they were

on the edge of a long clearing that stretched between palmetto barrens. Delano knew that long clearing very well. Fact is, he had landed there more than a few times, for this reason and that, back in the days when he was a rule breaking cadet. The clear space was within a hundred yards of the highway that runs between Web Field and Arcadia, nine miles to the north.

Well, rules or no rules, Cadet Delano had to look into that. Forthwith, or even faster than that, he lost altitude. The ground and that clear landing spot came up and up. Sure enough, the waving men were Web Fielders. Wonder what's eating them? Must find out.

Delano made his landing. The two men ran toward his plane.

"You, Brown?" Delano questioned. "Well, I'll be a— Say, what are you doing out here in the high grass, Cook?"

Cook Brown was a food destroyer at Web's officers' mess. With Brown was a C Flight cook, Dizzy Duncan. Delano knew the latter only slightly, but the former very well. Too well, perhaps. So well did he know Cook Brown that they owned an alligator between them. The landing of that young alligator had cost Uncle Sam two tractors; but that's another story, and a thing that good Cadet Delano was now trying to live down. Thinking fast, Delano again knocked on wood.

"Listen, Delano," Cook Brown hurried to explain, "we're in bad. Dizzy and myself went away from here with the Fort Dade gang, night before last, and we just came to a few hours ago. The world's all wrong. Our tongues are all woolly. Our heads couldn't get through the main gate, and that dark brown taste is with us. You've got to get us back in camp, Delano."

"Not so fast, feller. Not so fast!" Delano warned. "How come that I'm elected? How do I cut myself in on the job of sneaking two stews across a guard line? That's a major offense, guy, in any man's army. What's more, Brown, I just this hour got out from under the last mess you concocted for me, and—"

"Me concocted for you! Well, I'll be a dirty name! You crusty goof kaydet! Now, look here, Delano—don't me and you own one swell young 'gator between us, eh? Ain't we buddies, what? Sure we are, and it's up to you to open your big heart and see that Dizzy and myself get over the fence. You can hop us in, set down, and we'll take care of the rest."

"And in broad daylight!" Delano reminded them. "Now will you tell me how you two tangle footed coots are going to walk away from the deadline without being seen?"

Cook Brown went into thought. But the load was too heavy for his guessing gear. Dizzy Duncan, however, came out of the coma with a real idea.

"Listen, Delano," Dizzy drawled, "how about that big tin ship with the closed cabin? Is it still out on the line near headquarters hangar?"

"You mean the Junkers," Delano told Dizzy. "Yeh, it was out there as usual when I took off. What about it?"

"Well," Dizzy said, "you taxi your ship right alongside that cabin ship. We'll get out, crawl in the baggage compartment of that tin bus, and hide away till the hangar gang push it back into the hangar at recall. Then we'll wait till dark and make the barracks easy."

"That," said Cook Brown, "is one done-to-a-brown idea."

"Not so hot," Delano told them. "The fact remains that you birds are A.W.O.L. Sooner or later you'll make the Old Man's carpet. Then one of you gents will weaken and tell the world that Delano was at the bottom of the grand rescue scene. Nothing to it, you've got to walk through the gate and give yourselves up like a couple of men."

"Spoken like a damned chump!" snapped Cook Brown. "And after all I've done for you and your 'gator. No more first class meat for that lagoon pig, Delano. I can get two bucks for him; and he'll be cigaret cases by tomorrow

night. Damned if he won't!"

"Hold everything!" Cadet Delano wailed. "Let's talk this thing over. You boys want to ride back over the fence, eh? Is that the plot? Maybe we can improve on Dizzy's idea—but I'll tear out your heart, Brown, if anything happens to Baby Dodo."

"She's a standoff," Cook Brown agreed. "Now listen, you birds. I have a million dollar addition to Dizzy's small size idea. Do you know what happened when Dade cleaned up on us two years ago? Of course you don't, Delano. You're too young. You weren't dry behind the ears two years ago, to say anything about being in this man's army. Well, I'll tell you.

"That Dade gang mopped up on our bunch two years ago, almost as bad as they did day before yesterday. And this is what the playful gathering of gorillas did. They kidnaped half a dozen of our men, took them down to the wing loft in the last hangar, gagged and tied them up, then left them there. It was nearly a week before a goldbrick from D Flight found the men. They were all in, too. Now here's the plot: You hop us over the line, we hide out in the luggage compartment of that tin ship till dark. Then you come over to the hangar, tie and gag us, then tip off the guard on post that you've just heard a noise in headquarters hangar—

"Just a shake, just a shake; be back in a minute."

THERE was a Web Field truck coming along the highway. It was on its way to Arcadia. Cook Brown trotted out to the road. For a minute he held the truck driver in conversation. Then he came back through the palmetto to the ship.

"She's all fixed," he said. "That was Corporal King driving that truck. He and me's buddies. I told him to give the guardhouse a ring from Arcadia. He'll say that he's a Fort Dade man, and tip off the guard that they tied up a couplé of Web guys in the tin ship. That lets you out, Delano. King's going in for the evening mail. He won't call the guardhouse before dark. There's plenty of time; but, after all, you'll have to tie and gag us as soon as the hangars are closed for the night. Let's hop to it. Can you carry us both in that back pit?"

"One at a time," Delano answered. "This isn't a tri-motored transport, you know. Use your head, Brown. Two of you would stick up outa that rear pit like a sore thumb yelling for iodine. Come on, one of you climb in. Let's get the thing cleaned up. But I'll tell you, Brown, if it wasn't for a 'gator's honor I wouldn't run the risk. I'm just cutting my throat again. And another thing, I'm going to do the binding and gagging right now. That is, I'll bind your hands with your belt. Then hobble your ankles with your shoestrings when I get you in the Junkers. As soon as I get you both in the baggage compartment I'll shove some wool waste in your mouths, then I'm through. None of this thing of returning to the hangar after closing time. Come on, pull your belts and loosen your shoestrings."

Brown and Dizzy objected to that. They didn't like the idea of taking a plane ride with their hands tied behind, and you could hardly blame them for that. However, Delano stuck by his hard decision; and Cook Brown turned while Dizzy made a good job of the strapping of wrists. Then Dizzy helped Cook Brown aboard the ship. The ship Delano was using was a plane that had been used for camera and machine gun practise. There were no controls in the rear pit, and a passenger could keep well out of sight on the floorboards. Delano warned Brown to hug those floorboards closely. Then he took off.

Five minutes later Delano was pretty close to Web Field's north fence. Delano was all interest, for more than one reason. All the training ships were streaking cross-country, far from the

first solo and acrobatic stages. Those ships were flying north, far beyond where Delano had been holding confab on the ground. What's more, there was but one ship left on the deadline. It was the "tin" ship, the Junkers.

The Junkers was a German plane. It was one of a group that had come to Uncle Sam as a sort of spoils of war. France, Italy, England, and even Japan, each got a Zeppelin out of the same deal; but Uncle Sam only got a few Junkers. And Uncle Sam got these because the other Allied powers considered them junk. They weren't junk. They were wonderful all-metal planes. They were the best ships in air, and with the hardest name. They got that hard name because of the fire hazard. And the fire hazard came through the use of benzine instead of gas.

A few of the American-acquired Junkers planes had burned in the air. That's why Web Field had this one now, and why Web Field seemed content to push it out to the deadline each morning —let it rest there all day, unflown— then push it back at night. During its two weeks at Web it had been in the air only twice. But it was a swell six-passenger, single motored cabin job; and Cadet Delano, for one, longed to fly the fine climbing, fine handling craft. Hadn't he said that the C. O. wanted him to pilot it? Now it was alone on the line, just waiting for Brown and Dizzy to crawl into its baggage bay. That baggage bay was just behind the upholstered, full width cabin seat. You swung the center section of that back seat to one side in opening the door that gave access to the baggage compartment.

Cadet Delano made a short landing, took a good look at the row of hangars, then swung his Curtiss in close to the left side of the Junkers.

"Make it fast, Brown," he yelled.

Brown slid from the rear cockpit, feet first, and trotted to the cabin door which Delano had opened. Up and in went Brown. In went Delano. Open came the small door in the wide seat's back, and into the compartment went Brown.

"Feet up," Delano said; and he made a hard series of tough knots in the cook's shoestrings.

Out came Delano, closing the compartment door and outer cabin door after him. Then he ran to his own ship and swung up into the front seat again. There wasn't a soul on the deadline. Many of the mechanics had mooched rides with the ships that had flown away from the field. The rest of the macs, with the ships gone, had made tracks for the hangars, barracks and post exchange, better to beat the Florida heat and sneak up on a bit of goldbricking in the form of sleep. The Florida heat made them that way. But as Delano taxied down the field, just out from the deadline, he saw a guard on post walk from behind the end hangar. Delano swung his ship in close to the deadline and gave the guard a hail.

"Where's the gang?" he yelled.

The guard walked afield, came alongside and yelled:

"The C.O. and High Pockets just crashed somewheres up the line. We got a telephone at the guardhouse, from Fort Dade, about noon, saying that a pair of Web Field men were on a drunken prowl there at Dade for the past few days. You know the Old Man and High Pockets—they were sure hot for the kill. They'd run those drunks to earth. Yep, they hopped a plane right away and cut for Dade. We got a telephone from a packing house up north of Arcadia saying that some nigs had seen a plane go down, so it must be Dumb Dodo and High Pockets."

DELANO eased power to his ship, turned out from the deadline, hit her with full gun and was on his way. What a break for him, to say nothing of Brown and Dizzy! With the field clear like that, he should have little trouble in landing and storing Dizzy alongside Brown. Now was the time to hurry; and Delano did. He made it back to the clearing—

at no altitude at all—and dropped in for a short, snappy landing.

"Climb aboard," he yelled to Dizzy; adding, "You're in luck. The flying field is deserted. The Old Man and High Pockets got a tipoff that you and Brown were at Dade. They hopped a ship for Dade and crashed, so the story goes. All the planes have gone up to the wreck. And you two stews—" Delano was now strapping Dizzy's hands behind, as Dizzy stood in the rear pit with his back to Delano—"will get the full distance if the Old Man and High Pockets manage to spill you. All set. Hold everything and keep low."

It was pretty close to four o'clock when Delano's ship came over the north fence. At the far end of the deadline, down near Hangar 12, Delano could see a group of four or five macs, standing and chewing the fat as they watched the flying field and sky. And at the near end of the hangar line, Delano spotted his friend the guard and two off-duty sentries that had come out to stand and stare.

And just as Delano was clearing the north fence he looked down at a Web Dodge touring car that was coming along the sandy trail from the river that drifts to the Gulf, half a dozen miles west of Web. In the Dodge was Major Feest, the medical officer in charge of the post's hospital.

With Major Feest were Lieutenant Poor and Sergeant Coe. Those three were just about the whole of Web Field's medical force. Delano had to laugh. Ye gods! Said medical force had been fishing and, Delano guessed, there'd be the devil to pay when the Old Man learned of this. However, the field ambulance had gone north. There was a Medical Corps corporal in charge of that conveyance.

Things weren't going to be so easy for Delano and Dizzy. With those groups of men returning to the flying space, it was going to take some quick action to get Dizzy into the cabin ship before the curious came along to learn what Delano might know about the wreck. But he landed. Wheeled up to the left side of the Junkers. Took a quick glance, north and south, and snapped:

"Head first out of that seat, Dizzy. And slither out close to the cowling. I'll ease you down. Make it fast. That's the stuff! Up and in you go—this way. Here's your mate, Brown. Let's have those feet, Dizzy . . . That's jake . . . And now—" and Delano reached into an upholstered side pocket and secured a wad of wool waste—"open those traps and take a mouthful of this . . ."

Delano was fishing around in the side pocket of the outside cabin door when the first group of three macs hurried out to ask him what was what. Delano explained:

"I left some smokes in this pocket the other day. Any of you eggs swipe them, eh? Yeah, they're gone. What, the wreck? I don't know anything about it. I've been jazzing off to the east for the last two hours. Who wrecked?"

While Delano was trying his best to work that group away from the Junkers, down the line came Major Feest in his Dodge. With the major, besides Lieutenant Poor and Sergeant Coe, was the acting officer of the day, Lieutenant Rider. Rider had caught Major Feest at the main gate and told him all about the crash.

"How's your ship for gas, Delano?" Lieutenant Rider asked, swinging off the running-board of the Dodge.

"Just about out, sir," Delano answered. "I've been in the air for nearly two hours. I'll have her gassed right away, sir."

"Too much time, too much time," Rider objected. "I want to get Major Feest up to the wreck. Are there any other ships ready in the hangars?"

Rider addressed this last question to the group of macs. The macs said that all in-commission ships were in service, and now gone to the wreck. Rider pulled his upper lip and thought.

"Tell you what, Delano. Hop in the

Junkers, then Lieutenant Poor and Sergeant Coe can ride along. Perhaps they're all needed up at the crash."

Delano's brave heart missed a few shots. But he had no out. Rider was officer of the day. His order was as good as law. Delano would climb aboard the Junkers, but he'd stall. Maybe the first of the returning ships would begin to come out of the north before he had time to start and warm the Junkers' motor to its working heat.

"Make it fast, Delano," Rider urged. "A little speed! All right, Major Feest, climb aboard. You too, Poor. Up, Sergeant. And say—" said Rider, noticing that there were two empty seats left — "a few of you mechanics might just as well ride along. Perhaps you can help with the tearing down of the wreck. Climb aboard, Smith; and you too, Anderson. Good! There's a full load, Delano. Get that motor going. Come on, you macs, wind her up!"

Whew! Six men forward, and two more back where such weight should not be. Delano's heart dropped a few more shots. Cook Brown went close to two hundred pounds. Dizzy—guessed Delano—was all of one-seventy. Three hundred and seventy pounds back on the tail! Delano was going to have a job on his hands. Maybe the Junkers could climb out of the field with that load. Perhaps not. Well, Delano would soon find out all about that. But he still walked the dog. The macs pulled the prop through. The motor hit. Delano juggled the throttle, cut the switch and managed to kill the engine. Lieutenant Rider ran around in tight circles, madder than a wet hen, and yelled in two or three languages, all profane.

Then, hanging his head from a cabin window, Cadet Delano advised the macs to take a look at the tanks. See if this ship has full tanks. Somebody climb up on the nose and check the radiator's water too. Time, time, time! And Delano was managing to kill some of that time stuff. While the check of water, fuel and oil was being made, Delano studied the north sky. It was an empty sky. Not even a buzzard wheeled and loafed therein.

Lieutenant Rider did most of the checking; and he was fast.

"She's all jake, Delano," he finally yelled. "Switch on!"

DELANO gave the motor a rich mixture, choked the works and prevented a clean start. Then the macs had to wind the propeller backward and clean out the cylinders. More time killed. More and louder cussing by Rider. Also some of that there cussing by the macs on the propeller. Hell of a pilot, this crazy kaydet. Fouled the pots!

That, though, could not go on forever. The motor started in spite of abuse, and in spite of Delano. So at four-thirty, with his gay world gone sour on him, Cadet Delano took the bull by the horns, waved the chockblock men and eased power to the Junkers. His party of five chatted above the tincanny rattle of the all-metal craft, now taxiing heavily down the field. But Delano gave little attention to that chatting. His mind was on the live ballast aft.

The wind was out of the south, so Delano went clear down to the north fence before wheeling his tin ship's nose into the lift. Now he was all set to do it. What? For once, Delano wondered. But he opened the throttle, and she lumbered. Oh, how she lumbered! And the mile-long field was passing aft under her wheels, while those same wheels gave little promise of quitting the ground.

Full gun was on the motor now, and the vertical-six German engine was kicking out its full quota of revs per minute. Midfield came, and was passed. The Junkers was still on the ground. She was rolling fast, though, and the brave must not turn back. Turn back? Not if Delano was to break his neck. Or crack eight necks. He'd pull that rolling section of rambling, corrugated roofing off the ground or he'd—

She was off! Whoopee! and the south fence was just kissing her tailskid when the job of work was complete. Delano had bootstrapped over that fence.

Well, Delano had it in the air. It was hellishly tail-heavy. However, if the motor stayed with him, Delano could push his controls to the instrument board and hold that tail up in flying position. It was going to be work, but there was no way to pass said job on to the next man in line. There was no line. Delano was very much alone, alone in spite of the chatting group that gazed from the cabin windows and gloried in the art of flight. Some hop for them!

Delano made his first turn as soon as the heavy ship had won four hundred feet of altitude. Then he put the nose on the line that would lead them toward Fort Dade, and held directly and very tenaciously to that direction. The sooner he arrived at the scene of the wreck the better. He knew that, long before arriving, his arms would be numb from holding the controls forward. All that weight of tail on two good arms and mitts! Tell you what, it ran into labor.

After ten minutes of logy flight Arcadia went under. With that city put behind, all eyes were on the ground ahead and to all sides. There was nothing definite about the location of the wreck, but, with so many other planes in the neighborhood, they'd have no trouble locating the important spot. But when five o'clock arrived, with the once cocky cadet pretty well worn out, the Junkers was still in flight, with no wreck or other signs of activity spotted. Just when Delano was beginning to guess that maybe they'd overflown the location, Smith, one of the macs, pointed ahead and yelled:

"There she be, Kaydet. What a mess! M'gosh, High Pockets hung her in a tree. In a gang of trees. What fun! What fun!"

A few more minutes' flying brought them above the fun. Sure enough, High Pockets had hung his ship in a cluster of cypress. But that wasn't all. On the open barren, the barren that High Pockets had failed to reach in his glide, there were two more wrecks. Plain to see, two of the rescue planes had crashed together—perhaps in landing—and piled up in as nice a pile as you'd hope to find out there in the wilds of Florida.

"Ships No. 8 and 15," Smith yelled. "Two of your cockeyed, crazy kaydets, Delano. What a mess! *Beaucoup* work for salvage. Maybe for the undertaker."

Delano circled the mess of ships—good ships and ex-ships—on the ground. Men were working on all three wrecks. Carrying parts across the barren to the highway a quarter of a mile west. As yet they had not removed High Pockets' leavings from the cypress trees. It was a busy spot, that clearing. But Delano was busy too; and he was anxious to get out from behind all that straight-arm labor that he'd been doing for the past three-quarters of an hour. So he looked to his wind, nosed around into the slight breeze and dipped the Junkers' nose.

The barren was a fair landing field, and there was plenty of it. Moreover, a tail heavy ship presents few landing problems. Not much! The danged things are anxious to get down, dig their tailskids into the dirt and stop rolling—right there. Delano came down. Men on the landing space scattered. The Junkers put her wheels on the barren, kicked sand, rattled all her tin, bounced a few heavy, thudding bucks and rolled to a full stop, far downfield.

And Cadet Delano was there to tell you a job of work had been done. One complete flight—hellish take-off, devilish air work and satanic landing—had been made; and the Junkers, plus all eight necks, was still intact. So, after patting himself lavishly on the back, Delano wheeled the swell ship around and prepared to taxi her up to the west side of the barren, where a long line of Web Field ships had pulled up in orderly fashion.

Taking the gun again, the overloaded Junkers began to bump and waddle across the long, rough barren. Being rough, that sandy ground called for much power and plenty of good handling. Delano was the boy to furnish both. But the idea, under such ground conditions, is to keep her rolling. Keep her moving—plenty of propeller blast on the tail service—and you can put her right where you want her.

Well, there was a wide opening in the center of the long line of ships. That was where Delano chose to park. He wasn't far from that open spot now, and a few of the Web men were standing there thumbing him into place. They yelled and signaled Delano to hit her with full gun, as two ground men took hold of the Junkers' left wing tip and prepared to spin her around so's her nose would point out to the take-off space. Delano, with those men hanging their full weight on the monoplane's left wing tip, hit her with full gun, stepped on full left rudder, shoved his control ahead to lift the tail a bit and spun.

RIGHT then and there, in a flood of borrowed glory, Mayor Buttons, of Arcadia, whirled out of the palmetto in his big red roadster. Mayor Buttons, a close pal of Major Dodo Dodson and High Pockets, had just arrived on the scene. He and the Junkers met, full on; and, when the cloud of dust settled, the nose of the big tin ship was where the mayor had been—in that big red roadster. The mayor, through speed and a half miracle, had managed to jump just before the second of contact. Likewise, Delano had been quick. He had cut his switch. And the propeller had stopped straight across.

The gang pulled those mechanical jousters apart. Except for a few dents in the radiator and side cowlings, the Junkers was O.K. But the mayor's bus was going to be a tow job, for the steering column, windshield and seats were ruined. Still and all, Mayor Buttons, being a hail fellow, waved the thing aside. He was lucky, he said, to be among those able to look on and study the results.

But not so Major Dumb Dodo and High Pockets. They came cross-field a-roaring:

"You—Delano! Hear me? Delano, what the so-and-so d'y'mean by wrecking cars? Isn't there enough damned wreckage here now? How are you, Mr. Mayor? Hurt?"

"Didn't see the mayor's car, sir," was all Delano said.

"You wouldn't, Delano," was High Pockets' contribution.

And Cadet Acrid Akerly, standing there in the group, laughed a sneer.

The medical force was glad to learn that Major Dodo and High Pockets were unhurt. And they were just as sorry to learn that two pilots had been slightly damaged in the double wreck on the field. The ambulance had already started back to Web. And now, with the day ending, Major Dodo Dodson suddenly decided that it was a good time to start all those ships home. Better get them under way now or there'd be plenty of crackups if they were to try landings at Web after dark. The major and High Pockets picked a number of the riding mechanics to remain and finish the cleanup, and the pilots were ordered to get gone from there.

"And just a minute, Delano," Major Dumb Dodo finally said. "Captain Merritt will fly me home in this Junkers. You, Delano, can ride back with one of the other pilots. Wrecking cars, eh?"

Delano's heart hit bottom again. Hell's bells! High Pockets was a poor pilot under the best of conditions. With this heavy job he'd sure wash out—and the men in the compartment, to say nothing of his cabin passengers, were going to be up against it.

Delano, though, was helpless; so he climbed down. Smith, the mac, started to move out and make room for Major Dodo.

"Never mind, mechanic," Dodo said.

"This ship will carry seven. You just squat on the floor."

Delano's heart went lower—nine men aboard now.

Mayor Buttons, the major now recalled, had no car in which to return to Arcadia. How damned forgetful of the major! He called to Mayor Buttons, just as Delano was closing the cabin door.

"Mr. Mayor," said Dumb Dodo, "can we give you a lift down the line? Come on back to Web with us. Have dinner with me."

Mayor Buttons was right on the job. He started for the plane.

"All right, mechanic," Major Dodo now said to Mechanic Anderson, "you squat on the floor with your pardner. Make room for the mayor. She'll carry the eight of us, won't she, Captain?"

"You can't overload these ships, sir," High Pockets said.

Ten men aboard. Ten men on a dead man's chest; and the dead man was Cadet Delano. His once brave heart was in his shoes.

"Captain Merritt," Cadet Delano called up to High Pockets. "I found this plane very tail-heavy. I doubt, sir, if—"

"Good Lord, Delano!" answered High Pockets. "I didn't think that you ever had a doubt."

And all the bystanders—including Acrid Akerly—roared.

Somehow—the Lord knows how, and Delano is still at a loss to guess—High Pockets got that Junkers off the ground. It wasn't in the book, it wasn't natural; but he did it. Then Delano turned to a fellow cadet and said:

"Let's get going. I'm riding home with you."

Dusk was at hand when the Junkers took off. It would be quite dark by the time it reached Web. Delano wanted to be there at the finish. He knew it would be some fast finish. A few miles from Web, Delano and his mate overtook the Junkers. It was batting along, full gun, just above the Arcadia-Web highway. Though the sky was quite dark, Delano could see that all the passengers were standing as far forward as possible—getting their great weight off the tail. High Pockets, Delano knew, was in hell. Maybe Delano shed tears.

When the Junkers reached Web it did not go in for a landing. Instead, High Pockets circled the reservation. Maybe he was trying to exhaust some of his fuel cargo. Perhaps he was trying to make up his mind to attempt a landing. He circled and circled, and Delano, watching from the ground, knew that no man's arms could stand up under that control punishment for long. Seven o'clock came, and seven-thirty.

It was dark. There were no floodlights at Web, but gasoline flares were burning. All other ships had landed; and most of the post's personnel was out at the deadline, waiting to see the major and adjutant, who had landed a plane — safely — in a clump of trees. Delano, seeing all and hearing all and saying nothing, stood there and wondered how they were going to land this rambling tonnage.

"What — you, Delano?" Lieutenant Rider exclaimed, coming out to join the watchers. "Thought you were flying that ship."

"I was," Delano said. "But Captain Merritt relieved me."

"How did she handle?" Rider wanted to know; and he had sort of a smile on his honest Yank face.

"Awful tail-heavy, Lieutenant," Delano said. "You see, I had six men going up. But, hell, Lieutenant, Captain Merritt is flying back with eight aboard."

The officer of the day smiled a little more, and said—

"Ten, Delano."

Cadet Delano, without showing it, smiled a bit too.

CAPTAIN High Pockets Merritt must have reached the giving-up place. The watchers saw him take the Junkers downwind, turn and line her up for a landing. In he came, still with motor

yelling at full gun. Now, only a few feet off the ground, the Junkers was over the north fence. High Pockets throttled low. Delano's heart sank low with the fall of power. The heavy ship sank too, and with all the speed of an elevator with the cables cut.

Down she went, and hit Web Field with a resounding smack. And she didn't bounce. Not a single bounce. A wheel came a-helling toward the deadline. Men ducked, and that bounding wheel plowed through the corrugated iron side of a hangar. An awful crashing noise swelled upon the evening air. Then the Florida night went quiet; many men were running.

The Junkers was no more. She busted forty ways from the center, having scattered her parts—and passengers—over a hundred feet of Web Field. Major Feest was out cold, and bleeding. So was his lieutenant. But the medical sergeant staggered to his feet. Mayor Buttons, knocked cold, didn't know what happened. Smith and Anderson each had broken arms, and they were pretty well cut up in general. But Major Dodo Dodson and High Pockets, wonder men that they were, hadn't even lost voice.

"Ye gods!" yelled somebody. "You can't kill 'em."

"Damn it — where did *they* come from?" the major yelled when a few of the rescue party dragged Cook Brown and Dizzy into the picture. "Ah, aboard this plane, eh? Delano! Where's that Delano. D'y'hear me! Where's—"

"Beg pardon, sir," Officer of The Day Rider was saying. "I can account for these men. This noon, sir, just after you took off for Fort Dade, the guardhouse received an anonymous call saying that Cooks Brown and Duncan had been kidnaped by the Dade men and placed in the baggage compartment of the Junkers, bound and gagged. They have been there since the field day, sir. And as for Cadet Delano, I put him in charge of the Junkers, sir. He had no way of knowing that these two men were in the tail."

Cook Brown and Dizzy, still bound but not gagged, were a sorry sight. You'd almost cry for them. And both were dizzy now, having been used so badly. Oh, well, there was nothing for the major and High Pockets to do but cuss a lot, give orders and ride down to the hospital with the big parade that was going that way.

Seeing as how the day's doings were quite complete, Cadet Delano decided to drop in at the flying office, there to hand in his flying report. That was regulation; and Delano, at all times, delivered what was expected of him.

The officer in charge of flying was still on duty, picking up the odds and ends of the large afternoon.

"Hello, Delano," he said, glancing up from said work. And the officer in charge of flying was doing his best toward the complete, military avoidance of non-military laughter. "Delano," he added, "you were sure lucky in getting that Junkers off your hands before the return trip started. But how come you didn't notice she was tail-heavy?"

"I did, Lieutenant. And I warned Captain Merritt."

"What did he say?"

"He accused me of thinking."

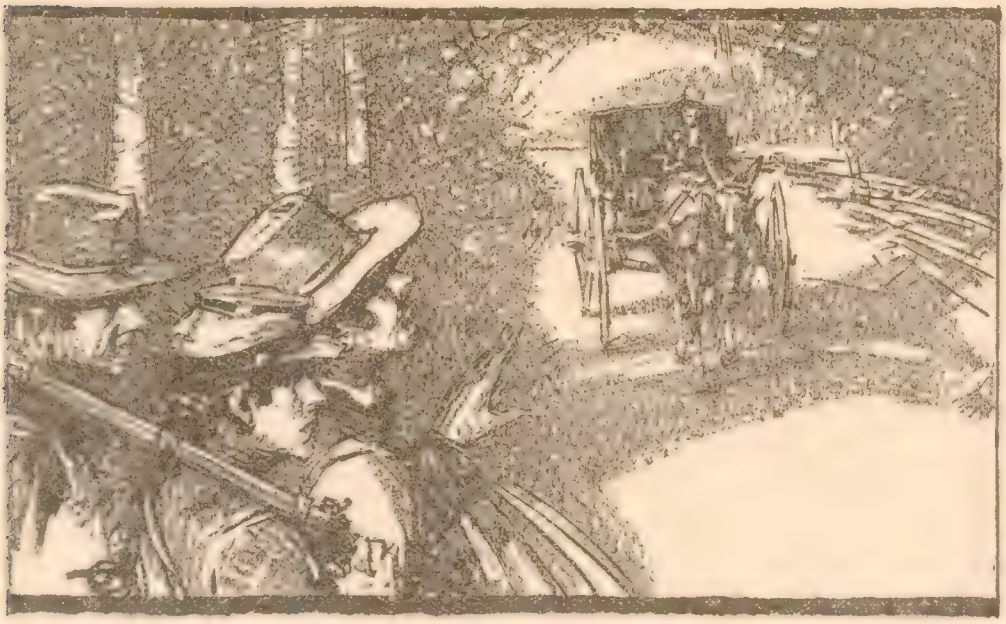
"That's libel," said the lieutenant. "You're only a cadet and not subject to thought."

"That's what I thought," agreed Delano. "But, say—how about making a memo reminding you to think to write out a line of honest, official commendation to Major Dodson about me, about the manner in which I landed that dangerous Junkers up at the wreck?"

"I think it's a good idea. Fair enough." The officer in charge of flying made a note on his scratch pad. "But, Delano," he mused, "it's sure funny how closely associated you are with all accidents here at Web Field, eh?"

"It's uncanny, Lieutenant. Damned if it ain't. But you know that one about too many cooks, don't you? No? Well, I'll drop in and explain the thing when I'm sure that I'm out of the woods."

The SWAMP OUTLAWS



By BOYDEN SPARKES

YOU must include the swamp in your reckoning to understand how it required ten years for Robeson County, North Carolina, populated by a brave people, to rid itself of the outlaws.

The cool breath of the swamp touching your face as you ride behind the wheel of your automobile seems to come from a green corridor with a floor of black water. The corridor lies at right angles to the new road. A North Carolina highway sign supports the legend: Bear Swamp. If you were to leave your automobile at this point and plunge into that place of dark and sinister shadows, you might begin to understand how it sheltered the outlaws for so long a time.

The swamp has many names in different places, but essentially it is an entity, a green and black embroidery sewn to the plainer cloth of fields of corn, tobacco and cotton by threads of sluggish streams, runs, branches, creeks and rivers. An explorer, untroubled by any desire to prove that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points, might trace the pattern of this embroidery through hidden channels over many counties far to the north, even into Dismal Swamp, and rarely see one of the cultivated fields whence come the major part of the riches of North Carolina.

It is a great land reserve, incredibly fertile, supporting life in a host of forms. There are deer in the swamp; also wild turkeys, alligators, rattlesnakes, cottonmouths, raccoons, otters; and swarms of insects, including wild bees whose honey feeds more bears than men.

The dimensions of the swamp are not to be measured, fairly, with the same

instruments that surveyed the routes of the almost new concrete highways which are now like the spokes of a wheel on every North Carolina county. Neither does an automobile speedometer, registering forty or fifty or sixty miles an hour, aid the imagination of a heedless tourist to appreciate that what remains uncleared and undrained of this Robeson County woods, that was the citadel of Henry Berry Lowry and his gang, is America as the first white men found it.

When you grasp that fact, you are ready for the beginning, for the step through the looking glass and the acceptance of an amazing fact. The Lowrys and all those farming people in the western part of Robeson County, who call themselves Indians, believe themselves to be, and are accepted by North Carolina's historians as being, the descendants of Sir Walter Raleigh's lost colony. A few iconoclasts hold to the belief that they are not the children of the people who vanished from Roanoke Island after Governor White sailed away from there in 1587; these few believe the white blood of the Croatans is a heritage from those members of the pirate crews of Blackbeard who were forced to dwell inshore by the authorities of Virginia after the sea fight in 1725 in which Blackbeard was killed.

There is convincing evidence to support the first theory, and little more than prejudice to support the second. The truth may lie in the fact that the swamp was the refuge and the blending agent of lost colonists, of pirate crews and refugee Indians too. These are facts: While untutored, these people spoke English with an Elizabethan flavor; in their cabins were homemade weapons modeled after old English crossbows, and their names include many that are identical with those of Raleigh's lost colonists. All this and other evidence has been set down in detail by Hamilton McMillan in a paper published in 1888, called "Sir Walter Raleigh's Lost Colony".

Yet, when one of these people, lighter skinned than most that stream through New York streets, has checked your oil, filled your gasoline tank and radiator and wiped off your windshield, how can it any longer truly be called a lost colony? The filling station proprietor, on that section of the highway which has been driven like a sword cut through Bear Swamp, after restoring the hose to its hook on the red gasoline pump, made a statement which had the merit of going to the root of the trouble which made outlaws of the Lowrys. His phrase had a curious sound. As he placed splint bottomed chairs for former Sheriff George Blunt McLeod and me to sit on, he said—

"We had no oath."

THEY had no oath; they were not allowed to vote; they were denied the right to possess arms and it was forbidden to sell them the whisky they so well knew how to make. All that came about in 1835—long before Henry Berry's time—when the North Carolina constitution was amended so as to deny the elective franchise to manumitted slaves and other free negroes.

The language of the amendment used the words "free persons of color" and this phrase was interpreted as including the Robeson County Indians, who spoke only English and had no Indian traditions whatever. All those rights have been restored now; they have the status of a separate race, their own good schools and, increasingly, the respect of their white neighbors.

They still remember the old bitterness. How heavily that bitterness weighed upon them I began to sense, when the filling station proprietor solemnly placed in my hands an old Spencer rifle. Carved on the stock in running script was the name of one of the outlaws: Tom Lowry. Tom was one of Henry Berry Lowry's older brothers.

"They killed his father," said the filling station man, "and hurt his mother. That was the start of it. But if you

want the straight of it, you better go see one of the Lowrys over near Harper's Ferry."

It was Old Billy Lowry, a kinsman of the one who was chief of the outlaws, who told us about the outbreak of what now is remembered as the Robeson County War. Billy Lowry is seventy-one, and his youngest child is seventy years younger than the father. The old man had been stripping tobacco all day and was just coming from the fields when we came a-visiting.

"I was at the digging-up," said Billy Lowry when we were seated under a chinaberry tree in the verdureless yard beside his house at sundown.

"They exhumed the bodies of Allen Lowry and his son William for a Christian burying," explained Riley Locklaer.

"I was at the burying, too," said Billy, "but I remember better about the digging up. I was only six or seven, but I saw the spades dig down through the soft dirt to the two men. Both were lying on their backs and handkerchiefs were spread over their faces. Otherwise they had been covered just like the burying of a dead mule. It seems like it was yesterday."

Actually it happened in February, 1864, when Henry Berry was a lad of eighteen; and it was because they had no oath.

Allen Lowry's father, William, had been a pensioner of the Government for services and a wound received in the Revolutionary War, but in the Civil War none of his people was allowed to enlist in the service of North Carolina. The men were, however, forced to work for the Confederate Army. Squads of them were rounded up and sent to the mouth of the Cape Fear River. There they were made to build up the sand walls of Fort Fisher; to cut wood for the boilers of blockade runners and to make salt from the sea water. They were paid twenty cents a day; but they were paid in Confederate money at a time when $50 of it was hardly enough to buy a bushel of corn.

"Pap hid out," said Billy Lowry. "So did Henry Berry Lowry and a lot of our men."

"That's why the home guards came," said Riley Locklaer.

All his life Allen Lowry had enjoyed the respect of his neighbors, but the hasty court-martial convicted him of receiving stolen goods, and his son William of taking these goods. A hole waist deep was dug in the woods, barely out of gun sound of Allen's wife's ears. The father and son were made to sit leaning over with their feet hanging in their grave. Then the guns roared and the father and son tumbled forward.

"They went to the house then," said Billy Lowry, "and corded Henry Berry Lowry's mother up by the thumbs, hit her in the face with a gun butt and fired shots past her head."

"They swung her up to make her tell where the boys was hid out," said Riley Locklaer.

"They tried to make her say the things were stolen property," said Billy. "The property was farm tools claimed by a neighbor family; they were Scotch people."

Whether William Lowry actually had been a member of the band of robbers, which beyond question dwelt in the swamp at that time, is not to be determined now; nor can it be said surely that his father, Allen, was guilty of helping the robbers or of the other offenses of which he was accused. There is no doubt that Henry Berry, when his father and brother had been killed, joined the robbers. He wanted weapons, and the robbers, systematically plundering the farmhouses in a region over ten miles square, had plenty of guns. It is a part of the legend that Henry Berry went into the swamp after saying to all his kinfolk—

"I will be revenged."

"All he had then was a little snake gun," said Billy Lowry. "You could kill birds with it, but not a man."

Ten months afterward this lad of eighteen had a bigger gun.

THE postmaster at Clay Valley was a bachelor who spent a great deal of his time hunting turkey and deer in the swamp. His name was James Barnes. What share, if any, he had in the fate that had befallen Henry Berry's father and brother, is a matter for conjecture. One morning, as Barnes was walking along the road that followed the top of the mill dam near Moss Neck, he was fired on. As he fell with twenty-eight buckshot in his breast, two men and a youth emerged from the bushes.

The youth, recognized by the victim as Henry Berry Lowry, ran forward and when he stood over the fallen man brought his double barreled shotgun to his shoulder. One hammer was still cocked. Barnes implored him not to shoot again, as he was bound to die from the wounds he had received. The son of Allen Lowry answered by pulling the trigger. The charge tore off part of Barnes' lower jaw. Sometime later in the morning Barnes' brother, Dr. John Barnes, concerned over the postmaster's failure to arrive at Clay Valley, set out to look for him.

James Barnes was alive and hideously athirst when his brother found him. In spite of his shattered jaw he gave an account of his assassination before he died. He named Henry Berry and said his two companions were white men. A little over a month later the bandit had marked another notch on his revenge score.

Brantley Harriss had been a member of the group that killed Allen and William Lowry, according to Billy Lowry; but he inflicted a further injury on the family. Two young men of the Lowry family, first cousins of Henry Berry, had been carried off to work on the Cape Fear fortifications. After a year or more of service they were given furloughs, but when they reached their home in Robeson County, Brantley Harriss took it upon himself to arrest them as deserters.

All of the evidence that survives indicates that Harriss was a lecherous bully. He said he was going to send the two young Lowrys back to Fort Fisher, and started with them to the railroad station at Moss Neck. On the way he killed them both. A warrant charging Harriss with murder was issued and given to Sheriff Reuben King.

The sheriff was a little slow about serving that warrant. On a Sunday afternoon, when it had been in his pocket for two days, Brantley Harriss went riding in a surrey with a woman other than his wife. He had driven her home, turned about and was bound elsewhere when a burst of buckshot from the roadside killed him.

"Henry Berry was hid in a clay hole when he fired on Brant Harriss," said Billy Lowry. "Brant Harriss had been at the killing of Henry Berry's father and brother. Besides, he had been trying to get Henry Berry. The Lowry boys used to come through his yard at night, and he moved his well curb, hoping they would be misled and fall into the well. Even so, Henry Berry did not fire on him when that woman was in the surrey. He just let him ride by and then got him as he came back."

A man who wore the blue uniform of a captain of the Union Army was the leader of the band of robbers with which Henry Berry and his brothers, Tom and Steve, consorted at that time. Among the others were Northern soldiers who had escaped from the prison at Florence, South Carolina; but when Sherman's army came through, completing the plundering that these men had been carrying on, the Northerners followed them. Henry Berry and his brothers remained in the swamp.

When the war was over, an effort was made to bring him to trial, not for his part in the robberies; not for the killing of Brantley Harriss; but for the murder of James Barnes. Once more in the farmhouses where women had shivered with dread at what might come out of the swamp, there were men protectors. Some of them were still wearing their ragged gray uniforms, and they were the

ones who determined it was high time to deal with the Lowrys—Henry Berry, Tom and Steve. Twice they had Henry Berry under lock and key and twice he escaped.

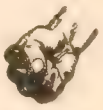
The first time they caught him at his wedding. It was 1866 and he twenty years old. His cousin, Rhoda Strong, whom he married, was sixteen. There are distractingly pretty girls in that part of the county which the people of Robeson used to call Scuffletown. A Hollywood casting director could use plenty of them. Yet none today, the old folks say, has the beauty of Rhoda Strong as she was when she became the bride of Henry Berry Lowry.

A posse closed in on the house and seized the bridegroom just as the concluding words of the marriage ceremony had been spoken. They locked him up in the jail at Whiteville, in the adjoining county of Columbus. The jail was built of ton timbers, great pine logs squared with an adze; its window was a lattice of iron bars and there were heavy iron cuffs linked by a chain on the prisoner's wrists. Through the window he could see the green of the swamp beckoning to him across the lesser green of the higher land. Then Rhoda came to visit him, bringing a hoecake; and there was a file hidden in the cake.

They had been married three years when he made his second escape from jail, and it was after this escape that he and his companions were outlawed.

A fugitive from justice may be declared an outlaw in North Carolina today, when the provocation is sufficient, by any two justices of the peace, or any judge of the supreme, superior or criminal courts. First they are required to have posted in the region commonly frequented by the fugitive a proclamation calling upon him to surrender himself to justice. Then, the law says, "If any person against whom a proclamation has thus been issued continues to stay out, lurk and conceal himself and does not immediately surrender himself, any citizen of the State may capture, arrest and bring him to justice, and in case of flight or resistance by him, after being called on and warned to surrender, may slay him without accusation or impeachment of any crime."

The particular crime, among their countless criminal acts, which resulted in the outlawing of the Lowry gang, was the murder of the sheriff, Reuben King. Probably it was true, as some of them afterward asserted, that there had been no intent to kill the sheriff; but they did mean to rob him. Robbery was a profession which they daily practised.



HENRY BERRY at this time was an awful person. The parchment yellow of the robber-chief's complexion was blemished just below his left eye by a crescent shaped scar black as the implement that caused it. An iron pot had fallen on him when he was a child. The eyes above that scar were hazel-gray; but when he was fighting mad the pupils dilated so that his enemies, those that lived, sometimes argued that he was black eyed. His hair was black and straight as that of his halfbreed Tuscarora grandmother; so was the hair of his mustache and the imperial on his chin.

Even his enemies agreed that he was handsome, although, living as he did his dress was often neglected. The brim of his black slouch hat was six inches wide. His boots were of calfskin and usually the pull-ons were exposed against his trousers of Kentucky jeans.

The father of Anderson Locklaer, the school teacher, used to say that Henry Berry was the heaviest walking man in North Carolina. In view of the armament he carried, it is no wonder his tread was heavy. He wore five revolvers, six-shooters, holstered in his belt. A Henry repeating rifle provided with a sixteen cartridge magazine was slung across his back by a shoulder strap. A canvas haversack, hung from his right shoulder by another strap, bulged with

ammunition. As an eating utensil and for ultimate defense he wore, sometimes in his boot, sometimes in his belt, a long bladed knife. But the weapon upon which he relied when there was murder to be done was his hand gun, a ten-gage, double barreled shotgun.

The loud voice of that death dealing tool, the numerous men who died with its roar in their ears, and a hymn the Lowrys had sung as boys when they had been required to attend church services accounted for the name bestowed upon it. Henry Berry Lowry called his hand gun Old Hark from the Tomb.

One other thing he carried habitually. It was a flask of white whisky. Mrs. Mary Norment, who wrote of Henry Berry's crimes, explained in her work, "The Lowry History", that he carried the whisky to avoid being poisoned by promiscuous drinking. In view of the common theory that poisonous liquor is a new evil associated with prohibition, this is an interesting sidelight on the times of this outlaw.

There were eleven men with Henry Berry on the January night in 1869 when he threw open the door of the King home and strode into the room where the sheriff was seated in front of a log fire in the company of a neighbor, S. E. Ward. What the sheriff saw were faces blackened for disguise; what he heard was a profane demand for his money. He sprang to his feet and seized the gun that was aimed at him. In the struggle it was discharged; and another of the robbers from the piazza fired a revolver bullet into the sheriff's back. One of the others then fired a charge from a shotgun into the arm of Mr. Ward. After that they plundered the house, taking clothing, the covers from the beds and the money the sheriff, bleeding on the floor, had on his person, $155 in currency and $20 in gold, according to Mrs. Norment.

This outrage occurred within a mile and a half of the courthouse in Lumberton; it was fifteen miles from Scuffletown where the Lowry gang had their headquarters. A large posse was sent after the robbers; but, when the sheriff died of his wound after seven weeks of suffering, they were still hiding in the swamp.

Then, somehow, Henry Berry was induced to surrender to Sheriff Howell and Dr. Thomas, agent of the Freedmen's Bureau. Certainly he never would have surrendered had he thought he would be convicted. Probably he placed his reliance in carpetbagger officials. Other members of the gang were arrested, Stephen Lowry, Calvin and Henderson Oxendine, George Applewhite, Shoemaker John (a negro) and one other. This one, who still lives, turned State's evidence.

Their case was appealed to the Supreme Court, and the robbers for greater security were removed to New Hanover County and locked up in the jail in Wilmington. Before a decision was given on that appeal, the people of Robeson were horrified by the news that the gang had broken out of jail and once more were free. How that was accomplished, how it could have been accomplished without collusion, was something that puzzled persons far beyond the borders of North Carolina.

The keeper of the jail at Wilmington said that, when he carried a pan of food to Henry Berry Lowry, the robber chief had suddenly covered him with a revolver. Where had he gotten a revolver? Long afterward Rhoda Lowry told her people that she had carried that weapon to her husband. It was concealed, she said, under her skirt, strapped to the inside of her thigh. How they managed to get back into Robeson County is not remembered, but very soon the people all knew they were back, more heavily freighted with guns —if that were possible—than before.

All were back, that is, except Calvin Oxendine. He had refused to leave jail with them. Afterward he was given another trial at Southport, across the river from the broken walls of Fort Fisher; and when he established an alibi was acquitted of complicity in the mur-

der of the sheriff.

Henry Berry Lowry and those who broke out of jail with him were now proclaimed to be outlaws. The state of North Carolina offered a reward of $10,000 to any who took him, dead or alive. For Tom and Steve Lowry the reward was $6,000 each. For their cousins, Andrew and Boss Strong, the price was $5,000 each and lesser amounts were offered for some others of the gang. In addition, Robeson County offered a reward of $200 for the capture or killing of any one of the robbers.

NOW there began a hunt in earnest. The size of the reward attracted adventurers from other States. One of the first of these manhunters from outside was a former Boston policeman named John Sanders. Cooperating with citizens of the county, this fat and partially bald reward seeker conceived a scheme for gaining the confidence of those people who regarded Henry Berry not as a criminal but as a hero. Some of the outlaws, and presumably Henry Berry, were persuaded that the swamp was no longer big enough to shelter them when their pelts were worth so much money.

Consequently, after Sanders had lived in Scuffletown for many months as a school teacher, they were inclined to listen to a proposal he made that he should guide them out of North Carolina to the Southwestern frontier, even, perhaps, across the Border into Mexico. Sander's downfall was caused by the necessity of keeping the authorities informed of the progress of his arrangements, so that the fleeing expedition might be trapped when it was out of the swamp. Wagons had been packed up ready for the move on a November night in 1870 when some one betrayed the real purpose of Sanders.

When they were convinced of his treachery, the outlaws seized him and tied him to a tree in the swamp. Then, after he had been allowed to say a prayer, Steve Lowry emptied both barrels of his shotgun into the protruding abdomen of the detective.

Some months previously the gang had added another murder to the list of crimes charged against them. Owen Norment—Black Owen he was called—had been commissioned captain of the militia after the war. He was courageous, absolutely without fear, his neighbors said, and in the performance of his duty as a militia officer he had incurred the hatred of the outlaws. Once he had arrested Andrew Strong, and another time he had arrested Zach McLaughlin on charges of stealing. Both had been released because the evidence against them was insufficient.

Then, when Sheriff King was murdered, Norment had led a part of the militia into the swamp in an unsuccessful effort to capture them. For this they killed him. One night, after he had told nursery tales to his children until they were fast asleep, he opened the door of his living room, intending to go to the rear yard. While he was silhouetted against the light behind him, a gun flashed. His wife reached the doorway in time to help him into the house. His leg had been shattered and he could not stand.

Obeying his instructions, Mrs. Norment closed the door and, after placing his rifle in his hands, supported her husband in her arms until her father and other neighbors responded to her screams for help.

When the doctor, who had been summoned by two of Norment's brothers-in-law, had driven three miles along a dark road to within less than a mile of the Norment home, a man stepped from behind a tree and fired a shotgun. The doctor's buggy mule dropped dead in its traces. The three men in the buggy leaped to the ground. They saw three men as they rushed for cover, and dared not return for the medicine and instruments left in the buggy. It was many hours before Norment received proper medical care. It was necessary to amputate his leg; and a day and a half after

he had been shot he died.

From that time, March, 1870, until the last of the outlaws was killed in February, 1874, all in Robeson County lived in constant fear of assassination. Nevertheless the next to be killed in this county war was a member of the outlaw band, Zach McLaughlin; the one, in fact, who was held accountable for the killing of Black Owen Norment.

Seemingly the outlaws felt the need of recruits. One night Zach McLaughlin, who was the foster brother of the Strong boys, fell in with young Henry Biggs. Zach was drunk and, drawing a revolver, told Biggs he had tried long enough to get him to join the band. He forced Biggs to accompany him while he robbed the cabins of some negroes. He kept on with his drinking and at last he grew sleepy. He compelled Biggs to build a fire and, when it was blazing, lay down, forcing Biggs to lie beside him.

Presently, according to Mrs. Norment, Zach was snoring and Biggs, moving ever so slowly, reached over and withdrew one of the outlaw's pistols from his belt. When the muzzle was against the back of Zach's head, Biggs pulled the trigger. Jumping to his feet, he fired another shot into the robber's head. Then Mr. Biggs, who still lives in Robeson County, reported to a justice of the peace. Thereafter the county paid to him $200.

Two months later eight young men of the McNeill family and five others succeeded in capturing another of the outlaws, Henderson Oxendine. They took him alive to Lumberton, thrust him in jail, and after trial and conviction Henderson Oxendine was hanged in the jail yard, the second of the gang to die and the only one who was hanged.

BEFORE he had been hanged, but after sentence had been passed on him, eleven men of the county, under the leadership of Colonel F. M. Wishart, formed themselves into a company to hunt down the rest of the outlaws. They were well armed with breech loading rifles and six-shooters. Time after time they went into the swamp, looking for their quarry; and then one night, when there were only five in the company, they hid themselves near the cabin of one of the outlaws, George Applewhite.

They remained there watching all night and through the next day. Indeed, they had watched so long that when, about four in the afternoon, they saw their man striding directly toward them, they became afflicted with something very like buck fever. W. H. McCallum was the first to rise out of the shrubbery and fire. His bullet struck Applewhite in the neck, but the wounded outlaw fired back before he turned to run. Then Frank McKay fired a load into his back. Two of the others fired as Applewhite reached the edge of the swamp and fell sprawling.

The five young men stopped then only long enough to snatch the outlaw's hat and a sack he had been carrying. They made all speed out of the vicinity, fearful that the sound of the guns would soon bring down upon them all of the outlaws. The next day when they returned with the sheriff and other men for the body, which would have been worth money, they found only a blood-stained spot.

The outlaws, they believed, had carried off the body to prevent them from collecting the reward. It was not until sometime afterward that they learned Applewhite had not been killed, although badly wounded. By that time he had escaped from the county. Afterward he was brought to trial, but was acquitted under the Amnesty Act.

A week or so after the shooting of Applewhite, Colonel Wishart, with six of his company and the sheriff, Rod McMillan, crept up to the cabin of Henry Berry Lowry on the edge of the swamp. They became convinced the entire band of outlaws were in the structure. The sheriff and one of the men crept away to get reenforcements. At

the house of Hugh Inman on the Lumber River the sheriff deputized two of the farmer's sons, Robert and Giles, and started back.

Old Billy Lowry was a boy of twelve then. With his father he had been to the grist mill.

"We were going home from the mill," Billy Lowry told me, "when our ox commenced blowing. He sniffed and blew and pap said, 'Billy, ain't that a dead man in the road?' He wasn't dead, but he just was breathing. Lying right flat on his belly. We carried him to Buie's Store. He was a-callin' for water."

Billy Lowry says that Henry Berry and Rhoda were the only ones in the cabin that day. Mrs. Norment's account says all the outlaws were there. These two versions agree about the trapdoor and tunnel. The trapdoor was in the flour cupboard of the cabin, and was the entrance to a tunnel leading into the swamp. Henry Berry (and possibly others) slipped out through that secret passageway and presently the sheriff, Frank McKay and the two Inman boys heard the roar of Old Hark From the Tomb. Giles Inman died there in the swamp and Frank McKay fell, badly wounded. It was the scent of his blood that excited the ox that Billy Lowry and his pappy were escorting home from the grist mill.

"That night," said Old Billy Lowry, "when Old Man Inman came out to feed his hogs he was a-crying. And suddenly Henry Berry was a-standing there by the hog pen with his guns. He said, 'I'm sorry; I'm sorry. If I'd 'a' known it was your son I would never have shot him.'"

Mr. Inman, according to Mrs. Norment, was a Republican in politics. The boy, Giles, was eighteen when he was killed.

About ten weeks later, in July, some board of strategy among the county authorities had conceived the idea that, if all of the wives of the outlaws were arrested, the husbands might be forced to surrender. Even if this were faulty reasoning, it was a violation of the law for any one to harbor an outlaw and unquestionably the women were helping their husbands all they could.

In carrying out this plan, fourteen men under Captain Charles MacRae were sent to the vicinity of Harper's Ferry Bridge, where most of the Lowrys had their homes. These men arrested Andrew Strong's wife. Another party of nine, which had arrested the wives of Henry Berry, Steve Lowry and George Applewhite, were proceeding with their prisoners toward Buie's Store when they ran into trouble.

A burst of fire from shrubbery at the roadside brought down three of the captors of the outlaws' women. Archibald McMjllan was killed, and Hector McNeill and Archibald Brown died of their wounds the next day. The two other men were less badly injured and these, with the four who were unhurt, by determined shooting, prevented the concealed outlaws from carrying out their evident intention of rescuing the women prisoners.

Colonel Wishart, when they were turned over to him at Buie's Store, arranged for them to be sent on to Lumberton. But the day's fighting was not over.

IN THE late afternoon, when Captain MacRae and ten men were lying under the cover of bushes at Wire Grass Landing, they heard talking on the stream above them. The Lumber River in that vicinity is not wide; an agile man, given a proper take-off, might leap from bank to bank. Overhead the trees form an arbor. The stream itself is like a river of ink from the blackness of the decaying leaves in its bed.

The outlaws were in a boat. The voices came nearer and one was louder than the voices of most men. That one, they knew, was Steve Lowry, oldest of the gang. Somehow the outlaws must have detected the presence of that force which awaited them around the bend.

At any rate, as old Billy Lowry told me, Steven left the boat.

"Steve," he said, "div."

Then, when I seemed puzzled, Old Billy repeated himself.

"Steve div out of the bateau. It was flat bottomed and hardly wide as a man. Henry Berry did not get out until they commenced firing. Then he went over the side and, using the bateau for cover, fired back at them. They couldn't hit him. They was scared. Some of them ran."

Mrs. Norment confirms that. She says the four who ran were mulattoes, but, when ordered back, obeyed. But Old Billy, who lived within sound of those guns, insists that Henry Berry won that fight with the militia without assistance. His shots wounded two, Duncan McCormick and Charles Smith; and before long the militia was in retreat. Mrs. Norment says the command to retire was given when their ammunition was exhausted. After all, they were untrained citizens, trying bravely to do their duty against a desperado whose skill with firearms was exceptional.

Four days later Henry Berry, Steve and Andrew Strong, walking slowly under the weight of their guns, went to the residence of John McNair. McNair could write and they needed an amanuensis.

The note was a demand for the release of their wives. Unless they were sent home by the following Monday, the outlaws warned that they would introduce new terrors into Robeson County. They had never physically harmed any white woman during their years of crime; nor had they committed arson; but now they threatened, unless their wives were restored to their homes, to kill and burn and—to carry the wives of other men into the swamp. McNair was ordered by them to carry the note to Lumberton.

The outlaws were waiting for him on the road from Lumberton as he drove homeward. They scowled when he repeated the sheriff's message of defiance. The women were still in jail on Monday, but on the following day they were sent home. What is known as pressure had been brought to bear on the sheriff and county commissioners by other citizens of the county.

It was the week after that occurrence that a company of Federal soldiers was sent into the county. For many weeks they were encamped in a vacant lot in Lumberton. They made forays into the vicinity of Scuffletown, but they captured no outlaws and, in spite of their presence, Old Hark from the Tomb boomed again. The soldiers had been in the county only a few days when Henry Berry added two more names to the list of his victims. The McLean brothers, Hugh and Murdoch, had been doing their best to kill him.

The brothers, with Archie McCallum, were riding in a buggy toward Maxton where they were to join others engaged in the hunt for the outlaws. About a mile outside of Maxton, all unaware, they came abreast of a blind formed of saplings. A voice cried "Halt" and almost in the same instant a gun was discharged at close range. McCallum leaped from the buggy as the frightened horse dashed off at a gallop. The two who remained in the buggy were dead.

McCallum ran toward Maxton and was followed most of the way by two of the outlaws, who kept firing at him. His leg was dripping blood from a nasty wound as he reached the village.

Always, it seems, the outlaws entertained the hope that with some final piece of daring they could gain the means of escape. Too many men were hunting them. They were in constant fear of treachery, even though they had been given repeated proofs of the loyalty of all who lived in Scuffletown.

One February morning in 1872 the people of Lumberton discovered that the outlaws had been among them the night before and committed a series of robberies. They had taken a horse and dray and a pair of high wheels and an axle used for hauling timber from one

of the stables in the village. Then they had gone to the general store of Pope & McLeod and taken the safe. That safe was the nearest thing to a bank in the Lumberton of that day. Mrs. Norment says it contained $22,000. Former Sheriff George Blunt McLeod, whose father was one of the owners of the store, says that he understood the sum was larger.

But that was not the only crime of that night. The robbers had taken the county's safe from the sheriff's office. That one they dropped before they had gotten fifty yards from the courthouse.

The Pope & McLeod safe was found half a mile or so out of town. It had been opened with tools taken from a village blacksmith shop and its contents were gone. It was a terrible blow to the firm of Pope & McLeod, but the consequences of that robbery are still regarded in Lumberton as something of a blessing. Within twenty-four hours Henry Berry Lowry was dead!

In after years Tom Lowry's widow, Frances, said it had been an accident. The gang had arrived at her house for breakfast the morning after the people of Lumberton discovered the robberies. Seemingly they had hidden their stolen wealth. Steve, Tom, Boss and Andrew Strong had entered the house, laid aside their guns and flopped on the beds. They were wet from the trip through the swamp. Then [she told Riley Locklaer] she had asked about Henry Berry.

"He'll be along," they said.

FRANCES was frying eggs and cooking meat for them, and stepped to the shelf outside the door where she kept a bucket of water. Then she saw Henry Berry gazing into her well. He had the butt of Old Hark from the Tomb on the well block and was preparing to draw the loads.

"They always did that," said Riley, "after a night in the wet. They had to be sure of dry loads in their guns."

Frances watched her brother-in-law a moment, and then turned to go back to her stove. As she did so the gun boomed. When she turned, Henry Berry was sprawled on the ground. Afterward his brothers said the butt of the gun had slipped so that the hammers struck against the well block. His head was shattered by the double charge of buckshot.

There was a burial service somewhere. The body was in a coffin when it was placed in the ground. It was worth $10,000 to any one who delivered it to the sheriff at Lumberton, but no one ever collected that reward. Peter Dial was one of those who attended the burial, but Peter never would tell even to his dying day. He said—

"He's in a coffin and the coffin's in a cemetery; but I'm under a vow."

Boss Strong was the next to go—two weeks later. He was lying on the floor of the cabin of his brother Andrew one night. His feet were to the fire and his head was not far from the cat hole in the wall of the cabin. Andrew's wife and a Miss Cummings were there. Boss was entertaining them by playing a mouth harp.

James McQueen, from Richmond County, North Carolina, was lying outside spying on them through the cat hole. McQueen, sometimes called Donahoe after the man who had raised him, had worked for wages in South Carolina long enough to get the money to buy a double barreled shotgun. Then he had come into Robeson County where there were chances of getting rich. Some one there was good enough to provide him with a Henry rifle. It was the muzzle of the Henry rifle that James McQueen pushed, ever so carefully, through the blackness of the cat hole into the cabin until it was within a yard of Boss Strong's head where he lay in the flickering light of the fire.

Andrew Strong, hiding in the shadow of the chimney after that shot, had told his wife to go outside to see what had caused the noise. Then suddenly he exclaimed:

"Come back, honey. He was blowing on that harp and it busted and blowed his head off." In a second, though, his confusion passed and he realized that his brother had been killed by a shot from the cat hole. That was when James McQueen slipped off into the swamp on his way to collect the reward of $5,000.

Colonel Wishart was the next to be killed. It was about two months after the killing of Boss Strong. Wishart had gone to meet Steve Lowry and Andrew Strong. They were to talk over a plan for a settlement of the war in the county. The next morning the militia leader's body was found. His mule was fastened to a limb nearby. There was a hole in his head and another in his body.

Tom Lowry was killed two months later by two brothers of Colonel Wishart in company with three other men of the county. They had been lying all night at a point where the main road crosses Holly Swamp, when Tom Lowry came along on his way to a public speaking at Union Chapel. He had just discovered their footprints when James McKay shot him. As he turned to run, A. S. Wishart fired a ball from a Spencer rifle through his body. Even so, Tom Lowry ran fifty yards before he fell dead. He was 37, weighed 180 pounds and the State paid $6,000 for his body.

Andrew Strong was shot in the back on Christmas day, 1872. He had gone to the country store at Pates, a station on what is now the Seaboard Airline Railroad. There he told William Wilson, the clerk, to leave the county by train time next day. Then he left in the company of Steve Lowry. After that, Wilson loaded a double barreled shotgun with buckshot. Andrew Strong reappeared at the store late in the afternoon and was leaning against a post on the piazza with his back to the store when Wilson fired and killed him.

The country store clerk, with the hammer cocked on the other barrel of his gun, then impressed four of the Indians lounging about the store, took a wagon and a pair of mules, loaded the outlaw's body aboard and drove with it to Lumberton.

It was fourteen months later that Steve Lowry, the last of the swamp outlaws, was shot and killed. A whisky wagon, canvas covered, had come into that troubled region. Steve had stolen six chickens and a turkey and then sent for his banjo. He had tuned his banjo in the light of the blazing bonfire built up by Davis Bullard, who was helping to betray him. His head was down while he tuned the instrument. As he raised it to begin his song, a Mr. Patterson and a Mr. Sutton, who had been stalking him for several days, pulled the triggers of their shotguns.

They took possession of the body and, so that there would be no question of its immediate recognition by the sheriff, they plugged the holes their shots had made in his face with wisps of frost pink cotton that they found in a nearby field. As they drove into Lumberton with the body the next day, the county knew the war was over.

A Story of Central America

BLOW-DOWN

By L. G BLOCHMAN

EVEN before the fruit steamer carrying Holloway across the Caribbean had deposited him at Puerto Justo, Travis decidedly disliked this youth he had never seen. He intimated as much when the district superintendent told him he was sending an American assistant to Winchona Farm.

"I don't need no timekeeper to grow bananas on Winchona," Travis had said. "Particularly the kind of timekeepers they send down these days. Still, what can a guy expect with banana growin' gettin' to be as excitin' as growin' pansies. I suppose you'll give me a college boy with a gold baseball hangin' on his watch chain and ten times more ideas than guts."

Several weeks of brooding augmented Travis's dislike to the point of a personal antagonism by the time the district superintendent's gasoline car sputtered through the bananas on the fruit company railway, to stop in front of the overseer's bungalow. As the superintendent and the new timekeeper hopped off, Travis remained sitting on the veranda, smoking a long black *puro*. It was nearly dark, but Travis could see that Holloway was of medium height,

a well built, rather awkward chap with a slicker over his arm. He was young, but not quite so young as Travis had imagined.

Holloway ambled up the steps and through the double screen doors. When the superintendent made the presentations, he grinned with some very white teeth, stuck out a big but by no means calloused hand, and said—

"Damned glad to know you, sir."

He didn't say "suh", but he showed more than a trace of Southern accent.

Travis shook the hand briefly, grunted something in reply, puffed out great clouds of smoke for a moment, then bellowed for his houseboy—

"José!"

José had long eyelashes and wore a hairnet to keep his glossy black hair properly sleeked back. When he appeared, Travis said—

"José, get the hell out there and *traiga* the baggage *de este señor.*"

Holloway turned to the boy and augmented the instructions in slightly stilted but correct Spanish, nicely pronounced despite his Southern accent showing through. Whereupon Travis hated his new assistant a little more. He could not stand these kids showing up with their Spanish all polished and ready to use. Travis, despite some thirty years in Latin-America, still spoke a jargon that was seldom more than seventy-five per cent Spanish, and usually included an ample leaven of undiluted American profanity.

As soon as the superintendent had gone back to district headquarters, some ten miles away, Travis opened up on Holloway.

"Why in hell did you come to a spot like this?" he demanded.

"This is much better than I expected," said Holloway.

"Wait till you've been here awhile," said Travis gloomily. "If you stay, of course. I doubt if you'll be able to stick the climate."

"Almost as hot here as it is at my home near New Orleans." Holloway grinned, and mopped his brow.

"Damn unhealthy climate. You takin' your quinine regular? No? Then I'd better get you some right away," said Travis, going after a supply he kept for distribution among his laborers.

He never used it himself. American overseers rarely did. Screens and the spraying gangs kept the anopheles mosquito and malaria far in the background.

When Holloway did not seem greatly impressed by his quinine speech, Travis went one better.

"Before it's too late, I'll show you where the snake bite shots are," said Travis solemnly.

He led the way to the icebox and brought out the kits of anti-venom serums with an air of alarming mystery. He wanted to convey the impression that these serums were rushed into use daily. Actually, he had never had a case of snake bite since he had been overseer at Winchona.

"What do you have most of here?" asked Holloway with great interest. "Coral snake or fer-de-lance?"

Travis slammed the icebox door and muttered—

"Both."

This damn kid wasn't twenty-four hours in the country, and he knew all about the snakes already. Got it out of books, of course . . .

"Well, you can see what a lousy life you're in for," said Travis.

"I think I'm going to like it," said Holloway.

"It don't lead nowhere," said Travis dismally. "Bananas is no future for a youngster like you. Where'll you be when you're fifty? Well, I'm past fifty. Take a look at me!"

It was when Travis took a look at himself that he disliked his new timekeeper the most.

Holloway represented a force of which Travis stood in some bewilderment and subliminal fear. Holloway personified the tide of efficient youth that was sweeping the last of Travis's kind out of the Caribbean.

TRAVIS was a relic of the days before fruit company sanitation gangs had cleaned up miasmic swamps and company engineers had pushed telephone lines through the jungle. He had first worked for the fruit company when the great, monotonous sea of banana plantation, that stretches seventy miles away from the coast, had barely begun to eat into the cliffs of virgin jungle. In those days men like Travis were eagerly hired because, being in a more or less constant alcoholic haze, they were oblivious of the mosquitos and other bodily discomforts. The amount of alcohol in their systems was considered prophylactic against malaria—the idea of screening houses having not yet blessed the tropics. And they never stayed at any job long.

Travis himself had been employed by the fruit company on seven separate occasions over a period of nearly thirty years. He had helped build three railroads. He had cleared jungle in Guatemala and planted bananas in Honduras. For awhile he ran drag-line crews in Colombia. Between times he might be bossing a gang of *chicleros* for some chewing gum outfit in British Honduras, or dabbling in revolution in Nicaragua, or coffee in Costa Rica.

But things had been getting more difficult for a footloose and carefree body in the Caribbean. Efficiency had raised its severe head among the bananas. The men Travis used to know were nearly all gone. Some had gone back to the States; some had settled down with plump Guatemaltecas to run cafés in Guatemala City; some had died off quietly and in bed. Their places were being taken by young men, fresh from college, many of them, who seemed to relish the increasing complexity of getting bananas to the United States. The precision and coordination of cutting just the required amount of just the proper grade of fruit and rushing it aboard a ship fifty miles away, all in a few hours, was a little bewildering in contrast to the leisurely plantation life of Travis's youth. But Travis had decided he would try to like it.

Travis had come back to the fruit company this last time a little less than a year before Holloway's arrival. He had come back with something of the same attitude of a repentant sinner entering a church. A mirror had shown him that his hair was getting pretty thin and gray, that his neck was beginning to wrinkle like a turtle's, and that tiny purple veins were subdividing the bulbous end of his turned-up nose as thoroughly as the cracks in Satsuma porcelain. He began to feel a vague need for salvation and security, and drifted into division headquarters of the fruit company at Platanera.

It was Travis's luck that the division manager had known him some twenty-five years previous, when they were both timekeepers near San Pedro Sula, and he knew that Travis, when sober, could grow bananas. It was Travis's further luck that the division manager was feeling in a particularly reminiscent and tenderly generous mood the day he appeared seeking a job, because Travis was given a farm and the admonition that this was to be "absolutely the last chance".

The first month that Travis was overseer at Winchona, the river backed up into the drainage ditches. Travis distinguished himself patching the levees, and saved most of his farm. Since then, in the less sensational routine, he was inclined to be a little negligent. However, he kept unusually sober—for Travis—and his superiors decided that with a timekeeper to look after the details he let slide, Travis might prove the exception to the rule about rolling stones. They sent him Holloway.

When Holloway arrived, Travis had thought up a dozen items for his education, varying from mere annoyance to turns which might possibly lead to getting rid of the youth. One of the choice items of the curriculum was Mercedes.

Mercedes was an American mule, re-

cently arrived from the States. Most of the mules on Caribbean banana farms are native bred, because they are cheaper and less temperamental than their American cousins. However, the native animals are too small for pulling a tram loaded with bananas or packing an overseer on a tour of inspection; hence the American importations. The American mules are not happy during their first weeks in the tropics. They are usually half wild to begin with. They are a little puzzled by the climate and strange surroundings. Then they are greatly dissatisfied with their tropical diet.

Mules in the States eat hay and oats. Mules on the shores of the Caribbean find epicurean delight in bunches of green bananas rejected at loading as bruised, undersized, or too nearly ripe to travel. Newly arrived American mules for many hungry weeks look disdainfully not only upon green bananas but upon mules so undiscriminating as to eat green bananas. Eventually, the expatriates bury their mulish pride and go native; but during the transitional period they are extremely difficult. Mercedes had undergone a long spell of proud hunger when Travis presented her to Holloway.

"This is Mercedes," said Travis one afternoon, as the mule boy brought two animals from the corral. "She'll be your private ridin' mule. Climb aboard. We're goin' on across the farm." Travis led the way down the tracks. "We can't get back too late. The district superintendent says he'll be over right after supper. He wants to talk to you."

Travis turned off the railway tracks, followed a tram line for a mile, then plunged his mule deep into the bananas. Holloway, riding Mercedes, trailed him down a Gothic colonnade of broad leaves, across a drainage ditch, into another thickly grown aisle.

Mercedes would turn around and start in the opposite direction at the slightest provocation. When Holloway reined in, she kicked up a fuss, reared and backed, finally galloping heavy footed through puddles of muddy water. She would hurdle stumps and rotting logs, remnants of the fallen jungle, veer off, rush close to the banana trees in an effort to scrape her rider off, ignoring, in her temperate zone manner, the frailty of the banana stalk.

Once she sank above her knee joints in black mud. Holloway had to get off and lead her out. By the time he had managed to mount again, Travis had disappeared. The profusion of foliage limited visibility to about fifty feet in any direction. The sameness of the outlook on all sides confused Holloway. He was surrounded by a ring of yellow-green stalks, a world of leaves—curled leaves of the sucker plants, unfurled leaves, tattered leaves like battle flags, some sere drooping leaves. He shouted. Travis returned, handing out a few tart remarks about handling mules.

After an hour's riding, in which period Holloway was lost four times, Travis stopped at a drainage ditch and pointed to the other side.

"You go through that section over there," he said, "and see what English fruit there is for next week."

He looked down at a wooden foot bridge. One plank was missing and another badly splintered.

"Hullo," he commented. "This ain't in no condition to be crossed by a mule that's been actin' like Mercedes. I'd tie her up and run over on foot."

Holloway dismounted, unwound a rope halter and made it fast to a banana tree. He picked his way gingerly over the weakened bridge, stepped in mud up to his boot tops, then started down a green cloister of banana leaves. Travis saw him making annoyed gestures as mosquitos flew up from the undergrowth, whining aggressively.

When Holloway had disappeared, Travis rode over to the tree to which Mercedes was tied. He drew his machete from the scabbard dangling from his saddle. Then, leaning over the neck of his mule, he cut a deep nick

through the concentric sheaths that made the trunk. Smiling to himself, he put away his machete. Suddenly he sank his spurs into the flanks of his mule. The mule leaped forward with a surprised snort, then broke into a gallop.

The snort and the sound of the gallop disturbed the reverie of Mercedes, who had been standing in silence, doubtless brooding over the humiliation of being expected to eat green bananas. Mercedes started up after her companion. The unsubstantial false trunk of the banana tree bent, then gave way where Travis's machete had nicked it. The great cluster of broad leaves swishing behind her completed Mercedes' panic. She was off.

SOME five hours later Holloway walked wearily up the steps to the veranda. He was covered with mud and soaked with perspiration.

Travis was sitting in the darkness, smoking a *puro*. He was bare to the waist, and wore only a pair of bright red trousers that he claimed some Indian had given him in Campeche. He surveyed the bedraggled and mud spattered Holloway without a flicker of expression.

"The district superintendent gone?" asked Holloway.

Travis grunted.

"The superintendent's got better things to do than wait on the greenest timekeeper in the division," he said.

"Any supper left?" asked Holloway.

"This ain't no all-night lunch wagon," said Travis. "Supper's at quarter to six. Where you been all this time?"

"My mule ran away," was the reply. "I've been walking. I got lost."

Travis made peculiar noises with his palate and nasal sinuses. They may have been sounds of pleasure, but they probably denoted scorn and derision.

"Lost?" he exclaimed incredulously. "Lost—on your own *finca?*"

"It was dark," explained Holloway. "I couldn't make out the section numbers, and my matches got wet in the rain. I finally hit a tram line, but I followed it in the wrong direction and wound up on the edge of the jungle."

"A good banana herder don't need no section numbers," said Travis. "He knows where he is by the height of the bananas, by the way buds are shootin'. And a good banana herder knows that a banana plant ain't no Rock of Gibraltar for no mule. I could have told you that this afternoon, but I thought you'd remember better if you learned by yourself."

Holloway found a dry cigaret on the table and lighted it. He smiled a little wearily.

"Thanks for the lesson," he said.

"Don't forget you got to make that river pick-up tonight," reminded Travis. "The launch stops back of the bungalow in three hours. If you're figurin' on takin' a nap in the meantime, be damned sure you don't oversleep."

Holloway smiled. The way he smiled at the indignities that Travis invented in the ensuing weeks, as though he considered the malicious little tricks legitimate hazing any green timekeeper might expect, only infuriated Travis further. He watched sullenly while Holloway found out he liked his job.

Holloway got on well with the peons working for him. He even got on with Mercedes, when that refractory mule had assumed her tropical personality under his tutelage. He induced her to taste a ripe banana, properly peeled; then he fed her ripe bananas unpeeled, then a green banana—and Mercedes was his. He fitted her out with a fancy saddle. He got himself an *acapulco*—a long, Mexican machete—and carried it in a fine scabbard of tooled leather that dangled ostentatiously from the pommel of his saddle. He wore a broad-brimmed Stetson hat. Then, one day after all his white shirts bore the brown stains of banana sap that marked him as a veteran, he rode the farm with a six-shooter on his hip and a few octaves of cartridges around his belt.

Travis had a mild attack of hys-

terics when he saw him. It was a full minute before he recovered power of speech.

"*Mad-ree dee Dee-ohs!*" exclaimed Travis in what he imagined was Spanish. "Where do you think you are—back in the States? You don't have to pack all that artillery down here, youngster."

Holloway laughed and said something about wanting to shoot a *tepeiscuinte* for dinner, if he got a good shot at one. He rode off, whistling the opening bars of "The Stars and Stripes Forever".

Several days later Travis came upon Wellington, Jamaica negro foreman of Winchona Farm's labor, whistling the opening bars of "The Stars and Stripes Forever". Somehow, Travis regarded this as a definite sign of Holloway's imminent ascendancy. And an omen of his own decline appeared the same day.

The second omen was a tattered, gray haired American whom Travis had known off and on for fifteen years. The man in tatters said he had just stopped off at the farm on his way from San Pedro Sula. He was walking to British Honduras, he said. There was some talk of a gold strike on the Belize River.

He had lost his job in San Pedro Sula. All he had done was go on a bat for four days. In the old days a man could go on a bat for a week or so, and nobody thought anything of it; now they were picking on puny and ridiculous little excuses like a four-day drunk to get rid of a man, so they could put a boy in his place. They were giving all the jobs to boys nowadays.

Travis gave the tattered American a meal, a bottle and two banknotes, but he did not offer a night's lodging. He sent him on his way to Puerto Justo, whence he could continue his journey toward the gold strike on the Belize River. To have him under his roof would have been painful to Travis, for the man in tatters was at once a ghost of the past and a prophet of the future. Travis was now sure that Holloway would get his job. Holloway was getting to know pretty much about banana culture. He was young, and he was efficient. They wanted young men, did they? Well . . .

TRAVIS was sitting on the veranda, clad in his red trousers, the night he had sent the ghost on his way. He saw himself as champion of his kind in the eternal struggle of age against usurping youth. He would have to get rid of Holloway; there was no alternative now. He would— Travis sat up straight. He had just had a thought that startled him. He poured himself another drink, and examined the idea again. Then, as though prompted by the guardian angel of gray haired men, Holloway himself restated the idea in slightly different words and without realizing its import. This time it startled Travis less.

"Mr. Travis," said Holloway, "I think we ought to fire Malero."

Malero! Something clicked inside Travis at mention of the name of Malero. A strange warmth suffused his being. Holloway was playing right into his hand, and Travis could not even be blamed. Was it Travis's fault that Malero was a vindictive person?

"What's the matter with Malero?" demanded Travis, and immediately wondered if he had sounded too gruff.

"He's the one that's been selling *aguardiente* to our *mozos*," said Holloway.

Aguardiente, illicit white sugarcane rum, is a disruptive force in the banana labor camps. The company's commissaries sell only beer.

"You got proofs that Malero's been sellin' white-eye?"

"Don't need proofs," said Holloway. "There are plenty of other reasons to fire him. He hasn't cut a stem of fruit for three days, and he's been tight as a tick. He's about ready for a row over some woman. I think we ought to get rid of him before the thing breaks."

"Well—" Travis appeared to be hesitating, although he knew exactly what he was going to answer.

He himself would hesitate to fire Malero. He had let Malero pretty much alone. So had Wellington. They both accepted Malero's unofficial lordship over the hundred *mozos* in the labor camp.

Malero was a dark, lithe and well muscled Nicaraguan who was generally believed to have come across the border in a hurry and about two jumps ahead of the agents of justice. Travis had overlooked his possible lapses in the past, because, aside from his sporadic periods of drunken idleness, he was a perfect worker.

He was not afraid to dispense energy. He could clear jungle with amazing ease and rapidity. He could wield a machete more effectively than any one in the division, either in the bananas, in the *monte* or in a fight. It was popularly supposed that he had used his machete on fellow-workers on at least two occasions; but as there was no witness to any of the choppings—the labor camp looking upon such matters as strictly between friends—the *comandancia* had ordered the corpses buried without making an arrest. And when the constituted authorities of the country are satisfied, why should Travis be otherwise in the matter of Malero? But now he suddenly took an entirely new view of the Nicaraguan.

"In that case, youngster," said Travis, "maybe we'd better fire the brute in the morning. Your Spanish is a little better than mine, so you go ahead and fire Malero."

"I sure will," said Holloway. "First thing in the morning."

Travis was greatly pleased with the turn events had taken. The fact that Holloway himself had suggested firing Malero seemed definitely to absolve Travis from blame attaching to any reaction Malero might show. Of course, there would be a reaction. These people almost always reacted when you fired them. If they happened to be a little spiffed, the more interesting the reaction was likely to be.

Travis remembered having fired a cook once for being drunk. It wasn't her being drunk that he minded, but her frying the potatoes in kerosene. When he told her she was through, she came back at him with a pair of scissors. And if a mere woman cook attacked a *mandador* with a pair of scissors on being fired, what might not be expected of Malero, the Nicaraguan bad man?

Next morning over the breakfast table, the arrangement didn't seem quite so meritorious to Travis. Somehow this Holloway boy suddenly became very human as he sat there, dipping his toast in his coffee. Heretofore he had been only a symbol—a symbol of youth displacing age; and he was still that, of course. He was going to get Travis's job . . .

"Have a *puro*," said Travis, handing Holloway one of his country made cheroots.

Holloway was a trifle surprised; this was the first time Travis had ever offered to share a smoke with him. He accepted.

"Thanks," he said. He removed the revenue stamp from the end of the cigar and lighted it. He puffed a moment in silence, then pushed back his chair. "I'd better start if I want to catch Malero," he said.

Travis looked at his watch and turned to Holloway.

"Ten to six," he commented. "Malero's probably out already. He ought to be on Section 22."

"I'd like to catch him before he gets away from the camp," said Holloway, standing up.

Travis followed him to the veranda. The mule boy was waiting with the two animals outside the hibiscus hedge. As Holloway closed the second screen door behind him and went down the steps, Travis opened his mouth to say something—but the words never issued.

He watched the timekeeper spring astride Mercedes and ride down the tracks. Then he went inside and poured himself a stiff drink.

HE DIDN'T feel the drink at all. It was like water. He walked into the kitchen and swore at the cook because the coffee that morning was watery. He looked at his watch. Six o'clock. Holloway must have reached the labor camp by now. There was a phone in the foreman's shack. In case he should decide not to have Malero fired after all, he could reach Holloway through Wellington's phone. He walked to the veranda and stood a moment, watching a cloud of yellow and white butterflies whirl above the path, flickering in the sunlight. He went in and took up the phone. There were voices in the receiver. What could you expect when there were twenty phones on one line?

When he had a clear line, Travis twisted the crank for three short rings. A woman's voice answered. It was the foreman's wife. Wellington had gone already. The timekeeper? She hadn't seen him. Wait, she would look. . . . Yes, Mr. Holloway was just going up the steps of the quarters next door. Yes, she would call him to the phone.

"Seen Malero yet?" asked Travis anxiously, when Holloway came to the instrument.

"Not yet. He finally decided to go to work this morning, and he's out with a cutting gang. I'm sending for him to come in."

The sound of Holloway's voice calmed Travis. It was the young, confident, efficient voice that Travis hated.

"O. K," said Travis. "Don't let him talk back to you."

He hung up. Taking his battered felt hat, roughly triangular in shape because of the way the two sides of the brim curled toward each other in front, he went out to his mule. He intended to make a leisurely inspection of the fruit being cut along the river, but he found himself urging his mule toward Section 22, where Malero would be at work. Riding along the tram line that served 22, he stopped to talk to a backer who was stacking stems of bananas. The backer said that Malero had passed on his way to the camp about fifteen minutes before. Travis turned his mule around and dug his heels into the animal's flanks until it broke into a reluctant trot.

When he came in sight of the long line of neat yellow buildings that housed the labor of Winchona, Travis saw a circle of excited men and women gathered about something near the rainwater tank. He rode nearly to the edge of the crowd, then dismounted. He noticed that the grass at his feet was beaded with fresh drops of crimson. Handing the reins to a boy, he pushed his way through the crowd.

Standing in the center of the circle, holding out his right hand while the wife of the foreman poured iodine over his knuckles, was Holloway. He was smiling and unruffled. Travis was puzzled.

"Where's Malero?" he asked.

Holloway looked up.

"Malero's gone," he said. "I fired him."

"And he took it—without a kick?"

"Oh, he kicked, all right. He was even a little nasty about it. He made a pass at me with his machete, but I gave him the old left-right before he got fairly into action. Clipped him on the chin. When he came to, all his stuff was moved out of the camp and packed for him. I paid him out of my own pocket so we wouldn't have him hanging around, waiting for the pay car. He bled a little on the grass there. You should have seen his dramatic exit—lots of cussing, with appropriate gestures, and a promise to come back for my life blood to square matters."

"He'll keep his promise, too," said Travis. "If I was you I'd get myself transferred to some other farm."

"Horse feathers! He'll move up the line, and by tomorrow he'll have talked some other overseer into a better job than he had here." He laughed.

Travis did not laugh. He was not at all pleased at the way the Malero business was developing. Holloway had

come out of it stronger and more firmly entrenched than ever. His prestige among the *mozos* was considerably heightened by his warding off Malero's attack bare handed. Wellington was particularly impressed. On learning what had happened, he immediately returned to his house to put on a new hat he had bought—a wide brimmed hat as nearly like Holloway's as he could find—and had been saving for a suitable occasion. The dismissal of the insubordinate Malero was certainly an occasion for the negro foreman. From now on he would be whistling "The Stars and Stripes Forever" without a break . . .

But Travis knew that the Malero business was by no means finished. Holloway might be more than ever intolerably efficient, but Malero would be back. He would appear on the farm some night, wild with *guaro,* and strike from the rear. He might even be drunk enough to attack from the front.

For the week following his discharge, nothing was heard of Malero except an unconfirmed rumor that he was living with some friends who worked for an independent planter across the river. The first definite sign of him came one Saturday night when Herford and Quale, overseer and timekeeper from the next company farm down the line, had come over to Winchona to play poker with Travis and Holloway.

It was one of those breathless evenings that make a man's shirt cling to the small of his back, when the humidity crawls on the back of his neck and fills his lungs like an ethereal cornmeal mush. There had been two rounds of highballs and the kitty had built up to a king pot when José, the houseboy, informed Travis in a stage whisper that there was somebody at the back door to see him.

"Who is it?" demanded Travis.

The boy said it was Wellington, *el capataz.*

"Why the hell couldn't he phone?" Travis wanted to know.

José had no idea why he couldn't have phoned. All he knew was that the *capataz* said it was very important. Sensing that something was amiss, Travis tossed in his hand—which contained only a very small pair anyway—and went through the bungalow to the rear.

Wellington was standing outside. Even in the dark, Travis could see that the foreman was in a high state of agitation.

"He has come back," Wellington blurted, as soon as he saw Travis. "Maleero has come back, sar, and he is creezy drank!"

"Drunk? What's he want?"

"He is quite wild from drinking white-eye. He sweers he will mardar Mister Hollowee this night, sar." Wellington panted.

"Where is he now?"

"He is shouting and chopping with his machete on the doors of the camp, sar. He says he is looking for that Conchita lady before he chops up Mister Hollowee. He tried to chop that Conchita lady's husband, but the husband is a quite fast runner. He chopped the husband's brother slightly. My wife, sar, is locked in our house in darkness, pretending vacancy. That is why I could not telephoon from theer. I traveled on foot to warn you."

"Thanks," said Travis.

"Should I not better notify the *comandancia* so they can send soldiers to prevent Maleero mardaring Mister Hollowee and others?"

Travis stared into the night. He seemed completely engrossed in listening to the dozen varieties of frogs industriously vocalizing in the hibiscus hedge. They made strange sounds, some of which might have been taken for the cackling of a hen, but none for the croaking of a temperate zone frog. Suddenly Travis spoke.

"Never mind phonin' the *comandancia,* Wellington," he said. "Grab a mule and hustle back to keep an eye on things at the camp. I can get the *comandante* on the phone from here."

TRAVIS went back into the bungalow without waiting for Wellington to reply. He passed the telephone on his way to the veranda and stopped. He glanced at the instrument, then went into his room for a handful of cigars. He stepped into the bathroom to look at himself in his shaving mirror. He wanted to see if he really had the appearance of a cold blooded fiend who would calmly allow a young man to be hacked to pieces. The face he saw in the mirror was that of a tormented and uncertain man, not in the least fierce. The face in the mirror seemed on the point of making a plea for Holloway as a human being, when Travis suddenly turned and left the room. Coming out, he passed the telephone again, but this time he refused to look at it.

When he resumed his seat in the poker game, there was a short silence. The three men stared at him. The blood had gone out of his face.

"Bad news, Travis?" inquired Herford.

"Gut ache," said Travis. "And here's just the medicine that'll cure it."

He poured himself half a tumbler of Scotch whisky and drained it straight in a single draft.

Herford looked at him quizzically for a moment, then started to deal the cards.

Mechanically, Travis picked up his hand. He was staring at Holloway. Lord, how he hated that efficient youth! He still wanted more than anything to get rid of this menace hanging over his job . . . And this Malero affair was entirely Holloway's business, wasn't it?

It was Holloway who had fired Malero —Holloway who had knocked him out— all on his own initiative. Travis had warned the youth, too, that Malero was vindictive. And anyhow, would it do any good to notify the *comandancia?* At this time of night the *comandante* might not come himself. Suppose he sent a couple of barefooted corporals with their stripes fastened to their sleeves with safety pins—what could they do to Malero, the machete-man?

"Hey, Travis, ain't you in this game?"

Travis glanced at his cards.

"I open for a red one," he said.

He won the pot and called for another round of drinks. The muggy night made the glasses sweat huge drops. The bottoms stuck to the table as the men slid the tumblers toward the host with the bottle.

The boy brought more ice and soda, but Travis poured himself another gargantuan slug of straight whisky, and swallowed it. He was jumpy. Seemingly preoccupied, he started when some one spoke to him. He leaned forward nervously every time the telephone bell jangled for some other party on the district line.

Every time he won a pot, he called for another round of drinks. He continued to take his own whisky neat, and in astonishing quantities. He tried to remember how long it had been since he had drunk like this. A little color came back into his cheeks. The veins stood out in his temples. He acted not unlike a man who was afraid of something.

It was during Holloway's deal that Travis began to feel his liquor. It hit him suddenly, like a wave of vertigo. He rested his head in his hands. There came to his ears a faint roar, like the roar of a distant express train. He thought it was the whisky, until the roar grew louder. Then he raised his head. He knew what it was.

"The rain sure is loud on the bananas tonight," commented Quale.

"Two miles off, I make it," said Herford. "Be here in three minutes."

The intensity of the sound increased. The roar was now the great drumming of giants upon a million taut membranes. The rain squall struck the bungalow, galloped over the corrugated iron roof, gurgled down the gutters into the drinking water tank. A white curtain poured from the eaves, splashing noisily on the ground, driving a fine spray through the screen to the veranda.

"Comes from a funny direction," said Herford, as he watched the spray drench

one end of the veranda. "That rain didn't ride the trades."

Travis paid no attention to this remark. His head was back in his hands. Holloway tossed two chips into the pot.

"Hey, what is this anyway?" shouted Quale to Travis. "A poker game or a slumber party? Are you in?"

"I'm in," said Travis.

He tossed in the chips without looking at his cards. He raised his head to stare through the screen into the darkness. The rain had stopped as suddenly as it began, but the night was still starless. Travis knew that the shadow of the slinking form he had seen out there, the nightmarish figure of the man with a long machete, was something projected by his own imagination. Not that the man with a machete might not very well be out there. He wondered if he had not better call the *comandancia* after all . . .

His eyes rested on the bottle near his elbow. It was nearly empty—scarcely two inches left in the bottom. He removed the cork, put the bottle to his lips and let the contents slide down without even going through the troublesome muscular contractions attendant to swallowing. Then he looked at his hand.

"Cards, sir?" inquired Holloway, who was dealing again.

"Two," said Travis.

Why the hell was Holloway always so polite? Always flaunting that Southern gentleman stuff while he was priming himself to steal an old-timer's job. Well, maybe the Southern gent would lose some of his politeness if he happened to meet Malero tonight—Malero full of white-eye and spoiling for revenge . . .

Ace and deuce of hearts. Not much good to a man who was trying to fill a spade flush. He made a move to toss his hand to the center of the table with the discards, but the cards slipped through his fingers. His fingers felt suddenly very clumsy and unnatural. They didn't seem to be his fingers. He felt cold perspiration oozing out upon his forehead.

There was really no reason for telephoning the *comandancia*. In the old days an overseer settled his own troubles without getting the *comandancia* mixed up in them. Anyhow, Malero might still be at the camp. He'd call the foreman on the phone and find out. He'd do it now, while this hand was being bet. He made an effort to get up, but seemed afflicted with a strange paralysis. He tried again and again. He was glued to his chair. He made a final effort, a supreme mobilization of his nervous and muscular powers. At last he felt himself free of his cumbersome body which refused to leave the chair.

With a sudden wrench, he pulled clear of his body and floated right through the ceiling, up and up. He heard voices very far away . . . What was it he wanted to remember about a telephone? Or was it something he wanted to forget?

"Hey, look at Travis! He's passed out!" Quale exclaimed.

Travis was sitting with his chin on his chest, his eyes closed, and his lips twisted into a foolish smile.

"Ain't you feeling well, Travis?" demanded Herford, shaking his arm.

The only reply from Travis was a guttural sound that might have been a prolonged grunt, but which was more probably a curtailed snore.

"Let's put him to bed," said Holloway.

HE AND Herford carried the unconscious overseer into his own room and laid him on his bed. Travis did not flutter an eyelid. His fixed, sheepish smile made him look very old and helpless as he lay there in a stupor. Even the occasional snore that ripped from him did not make him less a pathetic figure. Herford and Holloway went back to the veranda.

"Sit down, you birds, and get on with the game," said Quale. "I'm behind, and I can't stand you two quitting without giving me a chance to win back a few quetzales."

"It's late," said Herford.

"Tomorrow's Sunday," countered Quale. "There's no fruit to cut and we can sleep. It's my deal."

As the game was resumed, three-handed, a debate was launched on the sudden eclipse of Travis. Holloway said it wasn't surprising, in view of the amount of straight whisky Travis had put away in a short time. Travis had been drinking like a man deliberately seeking oblivion. Quale said it all went to prove that drinking was a young man's game. Herford, who was ten years older than Quale, said it wasn't a question of age at all, but of some mysterious equation of stomach and kidneys —in a word, of the way you happened to feel when you started drinking. The triangular debate was never carried to a logical conclusion. It was stopped abruptly and definitely by a storm out of a clear sky.

The bright stars shining in a cloud rift over the bananas beyond the tracks were making luminous crosses through the wire screening, when a blast of wind swept the veranda. The air was suddenly filled with playing cards. A curtain of bamboo slats at the south end of the veranda bellied out violently, straining at the cords anchored under a heavy table. The curtain swelled, flapped, jerked, then snapped the cords free.

The table went over with a bang, scattering magazines and phonograph records. A fern in a painted gasoline can blew off a tabouret. The bamboo curtain slapped itself loose from its upper moorings and came flying crazily across the veranda, to brush bottles and glasses to the floor in a shattered heap. Herford and Quale were buried under its green slats.

When Holloway extricated them, the three men looked at one another silently and solemnly. They knew the portent of sudden heavy winds, mortal enemy of the banana. As though jealous of the conquering march of modern methods in the tropics, nature is ever arising to strike dead that which she created and nurtured.

"There go half a million stems," said Herford gloomily.

"Maybe it's local," suggested Quale.

Herford had his nose against the screen.

"Local, hell," he said. "It looks like Winchona's blown flat. The wind's from the south, and it's still blowing. We got it, don't worry. Come on, kid, we'll have to get home to the funeral."

Quale followed him to the door. On the way out, Herford had a last word for Holloway.

"Tough luck to get blown down just when the old man is a bit blown himself," he said. "Tough for you, and maybe tough for him if the *jefe* happens along. Sorry I can't stay to help."

"I'll manage," said Holloway, as the two guests hurried away. "I'll get the *mandador* on his feet."

But getting the *mandador* on his feet was a hopeless job. Holloway's efforts to arouse Travis provoked only a series of incomprehensible mumbles. After a few futile minutes, the youth realized he would have to handle the situation alone.

He went to the phone, but the line was in use. Somebody else was reporting blow-downs.

Holloway went back to Travis's room and made further efforts to arouse the overseer. He tried whistling "The Stars and Stripes Forever" in his ear. He tried cold water. Results were negative. He went back to the phone and spun the handle to make the district superintendent's ring.

"Winchona's just been blown, sir," said Holloway.

"How many stems?" came the metallic voice of the superintendent.

"Haven't calculated yet, sir. I'll call back when I have."

"Is Travis out looking over the damage?"

Holloway hesitated a second. It would not do to report Travis out cold in a crucial situation.

"Why—Travis is here, sir. He's sick."

"What's the matter with him?" asked

the superintendent suspiciously.

Again a brief pause.

"Why, he seems to have a touch of fever," said Holloway.

"Want the motor to take him to the hospital,"

"Oh, no; he's not that sick," said Holloway quickly.

"Then he's well enough to check blow-downs," came the sharp rejoinder.

"I can do it just as well—"

"I want Travis to estimate Winchona," the superintendent insisted. "I've got another job for you. You're to cross the river and find out how badly the independents were blown. Find out how many farms over there can still give me English fruit for a Monday pick-up. Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir."

"All right, call me back when you've got figures."

Holloway hung up. He made another effort to restore Travis to consciousness, but the alcoholic slumber was deep. The sheepish smile on Travis's face had changed to a frozen grimace of worry, but the position of his body had not altered. Holloway got his boots and slicker, and phoned Wellington.

"Listen, Wellington, I want you to ride out and help me figure how much fruit we lost in this blow-down," he said, when the foreman had answered. "I want you to— What? . . . Why in hell should the *comandante* be over here? . . . No, nobody phoned that I know of. . . . No, Mr. Travis didn't say anything—he's in bed, sick, if it's anything to you. . . . Say, to hell with Malero; we've got more important things to worry about tonight. We've got a blow-down on our hands. . . . Well, I'm not afraid of him, drunk or sober. . . . All right, come by if you want to, but I should think it would be quicker for you to ride out to check the southern sections. You wouldn't have to come this way at all. . . . You've got Malero on the brain, Wellington. . . . Well, I'll wait five minutes for you. If you're not here then, I'm starting out alone."

HOLLOWAY smoked a cigaret on the veranda, then went outside to wait. The wind had slackened and came in puffs, just enough to blow rain into his face. As he walked down the path, he saw a shadow running along the tracks. He made an instinctive movement with his right hand, and had a pang of dismay when he realized that in the excitement of the past half hour he had not thought to buckle on his holster.

Then he laughed at himself, when he recognized the shadow as the mule boy. Mercedes, said the mule boy, was at the labor camp, where the *capataz* had been riding her. He had brought Lupe instead.

Holloway looked at the luminous dial of his watch. He had waited five minutes for Wellington already. He would wait a few minutes more. Climbing astride the mule, he lighted another cigaret. As his cupped hands reflected the flare of the match, he mused that he was making a pretty good target of himself. Then he smiled as he realized that Wellington had started him thinking of Malero, in spite of himself.

When he had smoked half his cigaret, he decided that Wellington must have followed his original orders to inspect the southern sections. For a moment he thought he had heard the foreman whistling, but the sound was obscured and confused in the noise of the rain. Probably imagination. He headed his mule up the tracks.

Holloway forgot all about Malero when he began to estimate all the bananas he had lost. That afternoon he could not see ten feet beyond the tracks because of the green ramparts of banana plants, and only a hundred yards down the tracks because of a curve. Tonight—or, rather, this morning, since it was past midnight—he could look across six miles of wrecked plantation beyond the tracks. Down the tracks, Holloway could now see the lights of Poltec Farm bungalow, four miles away. In between, the trees, heavy with fruit,

had bent and broken like straws in the hands of a child. The feathery confusion of great leaves had been flattened out and lay desolate in the darkness.

For several hours he rode through the devastated sections of his farm. He was stunned by the extent of the damage. He had had it impressed upon him, of course, that the banana plant was at the mercy of a dozen hazards; yet to see many acres of plantation destroyed in a few minutes, reduced to a sorry army of broken necked trees dragging their full clusters of green fruit in the black mud, was nevertheless a shock. At least twenty thousand stems of fruit had been lost in less than a quarter-hour of wind. He would phone in his report . . .

He was nearly back before he thought of Malero again—with a start. Again he laughed. Wellington must have been exaggerating a little. If Malero was really set on chopping up a timekeeper, he would have had ample opportunity during the last two hours, for Holloway had been completely off his guard.

Approaching the bungalow, Holloway heard the irregular put-put of a gas engine—probably the district superintendent's motor speeding over the rails to Winchona Farm or beyond. Holloway hurried his mule.

He found the district superintendent's motor stopped on the rails in front of the bungalow. The motor boy was just curling up under the canopy for a nap. Holloway interrupted him to inquire if his boss was in the bungalow. The motor boy said he was.

Holloway's pulse quickened as he climbed the steps. The veranda was still strewn with the wreckage caused by the wind—the crumpled green blind, the overturned table, the broken glasses and empty bottles on the floor. Holloway could well imagine the deductions made by the district superintendent on his entrance.

Holloway found the superintendent standing just inside the door of Travis's room. He had apparently stopped short in surprise, although his expression gave no indication of his thoughts as he stared at Travis, sprawled on his stomach crosswise on the bed, with his head and arms hanging over the near edge.

"How long has he been like this?" asked the superintendent, turning his head at Holloway's approach.

Travis stirred a little.

"I'm afraid we've lost at least twenty thousand stems, sir," said Holloway, as if he had not heard the question.

Holloway's voice roused Travis completely. His eyes opened, half bewildered, half hostile. He raised his head with difficulty, saw Holloway and the superintendent standing in the doorway, then, clutching the edge of his bed, turned over on his back and sat up unsteadily.

"I'm not drunk!" he exclaimed belligerently, if somewhat thickly.

The district superintendent said nothing.

"How's your fever, Travis?" inquired Holloway.

"Who's got any fever?" demanded Travis, making a clumsy effort to get his feet on the floor. "I'm all right, I tell you."

He closed his eyes, as though to shut out the sight of the room revolving about him on an inclined axis. When he opened them, he fixed his gaze on the two men before him. With an oath, he pointed at Holloway.

"You sneakin' little cockroach!" he shouted.

And from that modest beginning, Travis worked up to a high pitch that set the warm night air vibrating with some of the most resounding profanity that ever echoed from the shores of the Caribbean—and the shores of the Caribbean are by no means virgin to profane echoes. Then he tapered off again to end quietly by referring to Holloway as a milk sucking, back stabbing, underhanded brat, and a telltale skunk.

"You get me plastered," he charged, "and then go get the district superintendent to see what a mess I'm in. Well, I'm not plastered—"

"You're all wrong, Travis," the superintendent began. "Holloway didn't—"

"Don't tell me I'm wrong!" bellowed Travis. "I planted bananas down here when you was still wearin' rubber pants. When that railway out there was bein' laid down by a naked Indian woman with a baby on her back, I was here drinkin' *aguardiente* with her husband, in between him boltin' the rails together. I'm older'n the two of you together, and I know when I'm right. I know this kid here is after my job—"

"Don't be ridiculous, Travis."

"Don't tell me I'm ridiculous, dammit! Don't I know every snivel nosed timekeeper wants to be an overseer before he's learned to tell his ear from a drainage ditch? This bright boy here thinks he's caught Old Man Travis with his trou' around his ankles. Well, let me tell you—"

"I can't listen to all this now, Travis. Winchona's been blown."

This announcement seemed to sober Travis about five degrees.

"Fine!" he exclaimed ironically. "Old Man Travis too drunk to report a blowdown. Why don't you fire me and get it over with?"

"Sleep this off, Travis," said the district superintendent in an impersonal tone. "We'll talk about it tomorrow."

But Travis was not to be denied. His eyes blazed. The bed shook as he tightened his grip on the edge of the mattress. This was the moment that had been hanging over his head like the Sword of Damocles for the past year and more. This was the worry that had been always uneasily present in the background of his thoughts, the situation he had feared because he saw it as inevitable—Travis impotent in a crisis while the young and efficient timekeeper went on functioning beyond all expectations. The moment had come, and they were still putting it off.

"You mean you won't fire me?" demanded Travis.

"We'll talk about it later," said the district superintendent.

Travis leaned far out over the edge of the bed. Thrusting his head forward, he bared his teeth as though he were about to snarl. He seemed to choke for a moment at the sight of Holloway, safe and sound, standing behind the district superintendent. Finally he managed to shout:

"All right, if you won't fire me, I'll quit. I resign, Fuller. Get me? I resign!"

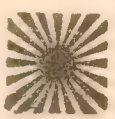
Then he toppled off the bed ignominiously.

When Holloway and Fuller lifted him back, he was already asleep.

"Better hurry across the river," said the superintendent to Holloway. "I want to know how much fruit the independents lost. See Don Carlos Vida first."

Holloway left the bungalow by the back way. Beyond the hibiscus hedge the path was blocked by the ruined bananas. For awhile he used his flashlight as he picked his way over the tangle of leaves and fallen stalks. As he approached the river he snapped out the light. Dawn was already silvering the muddy current and streaking with pale fingers the leaden bellied clouds that covered the sky. Parrots in pairs flew screaming beyond the river to the frontier, where twisted mist wreaths moved across the flank of blue-gray mountains like restless phantoms.

As Holloway started walking along the muddy bank, the waiting boatman stopped munching a bean filled, folded *tortilla* and started his motor.



TRAVIS awoke with an inch of unwashed wool upon his tongue and a feeling of impending catastrophe upon his soul. His skull was two sizes too small. The light hurt his eyes. He blinked. As he rolled out of bed, he was mildly surprised to find that he was fully dressed; he was wearing his bright red trousers. The discovery only served to augment his vague sense of disaster as he shuffled stiffly to the veranda. He

sank into a chair, closed his eyes and shouted for José and a pick-me-up.

When he opened his eyes, the sight of the bananas blown flat by the wind brought him up with a start. His indefinable impression of something wrong assumed definition as memories of last night rushed upon him. Malero—blow-down—Holloway—district superintendent—resignation! . . .

The whole thing was a little unreal now, but he remembered quite distinctly having resigned. He felt a strange sensation of relief at the thought—no regret, only freedom from the fear that had obsessed him. He also felt a new surge of hate for Holloway, as he tried to piece together his impressions of the timekeeper, evidently in the rôle of informer, talking to the district superintendent. Well, he wasn't through with Holloway yet. Before he left Winchona, he'd repay that nasty little trick of Holloway's.

As José brought a drink, Travis swallowed it with an exaggerated notion of refreshment. He wondered vaguely what had become of Holloway. It was noon; he should be back from across the river.

The desolate appearance of the wind wrecked plantation was accentuated by the steamy glare of the midday sun. There were no laborers about. The first gangs ought to be out clearing away the mess, but Travis reflected, with a luxurious feeling, that he was not going to set the *mozos* to work. He had resigned.

For some minutes he had been uneasily watching what appeared to be a mobilization of *zopilotes* a hundred and fifty yards from the bungalow. The great, gray hooded buzzards were tremendously interested in something hidden in the ruined bananas a short distance from the tracks. A dozen birds circled gloomily above, while perhaps twice that number were either perched on broken banana stalks, or huddled on the ground with much awkward hopping and flapping of wings.

Twice Travis was on the point of walking over to see what the buzzards were doing, but he decided both times that he didn't want to know. Probably just a mule, he told himself. A moment later he thought of sending the houseboy over—just to see what mule it was.

"José!" he called.

When José arrived, Travis stared at him for thirty seconds. The houseboy was wearing a band of green silk tied around his hair.

"Mix *un otro* highball," ordered Travis.

He lighted a *puro,* and found it had an unfamiliar taste. He continued to watch the *zopilotes.*

Ten minutes later Holloway came home. He walked up from the river and entered the bungalow from the rear.

"Wellington call in with figures on the southern sections?" he asked as he came on the veranda.

Travis jumped at the sound of his voice. He did not turn around.

"How the hell should I know?" he replied testily. "I don't work here no more. Didn't you hear me resign last night?"

"Forget your *goma* for a minute," said Holloway, "and tell me if the foreman phoned."

"Not that I know of," said Travis.

Holloway went to the telephone and returned a moment later. There were puzzled lines on his forehead.

"Say, youngster," Travis exclaimed, pointing with his cigar, "what do you suppose them birds are so busy about down there?"

Holloway took one look, then left in a hurry. He started down the tracks in as close to a run as a man ever walks in the tropical sun.

Travis saw the buzzards rise in a dark panic of wings as Holloway approached. He saw Holloway bend over something, straighten up, start back to the bungalow. The youth walked rapidly on his way back, also, but it was a different walk—a rigid walk, with arms swinging in short, stiff arcs, and fists clenched.

When the second screen door slammed behind him, Holloway walked over to

Travis, stood above him a moment, then exclaimed—

"Criminal!"

"What's the idea?" asked Travis.

"You knew Malero was around last night?"

"Sure," said Travis.

"Why didn't you say something?"

"I tried to warn you about Malero once, and you laughed at me. Why all this fuss now?"

"He's killed Wellington," said Holloway. "It must have been Malero; chopped him from behind; dragged him into the bananas."

Travis grunted.

"Lucky it wasn't you," he said.

"I think it was meant to be me," said Holloway. "Wellington was wearing a hat like mine, he was riding my mule, and probably whistling something he'd heard me whistle. In the dark—"

"Malero'll be furious if he finds out his mistake," said Travis dryly.

Holloway stared at Travis for a moment, then strode in to the telephone.

THE next few hours were busy ones. The *comandante* arrived, swart, portly and pockmarked, pledged his entire garrison in the search for Malero, predicted an early capture and execution. The phone jangled continuously. The district office wanted new crop estimates and revised figures on the blow-down.

Division headquarters offered bright ideas for filling fruit allotments. There were three steamers to load at Puerto Justo next week, and bananas had to be found somewhere, blow-down or no blow-down. Cutting gangs would go out next day as usual. Launch and lighters would pick up the fruit of independent farmers who escaped the wind. Gangs were to be set to work cleaning up the wrecked sections of Winchona. There was a new foreman to hire, and an old foreman to bury.

Through all of it, Travis sat on the veranda, ostentatiously idle.

A little before sunset Holloway sat down and drank a highball.

"I needed that," he commented. "I haven't as much as set foot in my bedroom for thirty-six hours."

Travis looked at him. Holloway was red eyed from lack of sleep. Weariness made pouches under his eyes and slowed his movements. A reddish stubble covered his face.

"Durin' the spring floods," said Travis, "I went without sleep for four days."

"Nevertheless," countered Holloway, "I'm going to get fifty winks before supper. You'll stay for supper, I suppose?"

"Maybe," said Travis.

Holloway went to his own room, sprawled on the bed and was asleep immediately.

Travis then decided to leave before Holloway woke up. He would take a mule—at least as far as the district office. It would take him no time to throw his belongings together, because he had practically no belongings. There were some bottled goods, however, that he wanted to take with him. He walked silently in his stocking feet to the dining room. From the sideboard he extracted two full bottles of whisky and a bottle of brandy three-quarters full. He held the two whisky bottles in his right hand and the brandy bottle in his left—by the necks, like Indian clubs. As he hefted them, he had a sudden impulse to swing them across the young face of the timekeeper who would take his place as overseer next day. He went to Holloway's room.

Pausing in the doorway, he regarded the unshaven face of the youth, mouth open in sleep. He had a peculiar desire to throw things into that gaping mouth. He took several silent steps forward. Then his eye caught something moving under the bed.

He saw a man crawling out backward. Travis stopped, watched him straighten up, get to one knee, then to his feet. The man's movements were deliberate but stiff, as though he had remained in a cramped position for a long time.

Even from the back, Travis instantly recognized the man as Malero.

Malero stood a moment, looking down at the sleeping Holloway.

Travis continued to watch him with detached calm. He found himself wondering how long the Nicaraguan had been waiting under the bed for Holloway, and how he had managed to get into the house unobserved. He had probably come in before the servants were up, just after Holloway had started across the river.

Malero plucked at his belt. He raised his arm. There was a gleam of metal as he poised his long machete above his head.

The machete swung downward.

Travis suddenly whipped out his arm, hurled the two whisky bottles like hand grenades.

One bottle smashed against the wall. The other caught Maleró behind the ear. He dropped forward, struck the edge of the bed and fell to the floor.

Holloway sat up in panic. He sniffed at the fumes of the whisky spattered on the wall. He stared open eyed at the blood on his bed. He winced when he discovered a flap of flesh neatly sliced from his shoulder and hanging down his arm. He looked at Travis, who had just seated himself in a chair and was extracting the cork from the bottle of brandy he still held.

Travis raised the bottle to his lips, replaced the cork and raised his voice to call the houseboy.

"José!" he shouted. "*Traiga un gran* piece of rope and damn *pronto!*"

Holloway looked down and saw Malero lying on the floor. He raised his eyes to look at Travis quizzically.

"Have some brandy?" Travis suggested, passing the bottle.

Holloway accepted, then began to give attention to his wound.

Travis seemed embarrassed, and avoided Holloway's eyes. He welcomed the arrival of José with a piece of rope. Malero began to stir as Travis knotted the cord about his ankles. He talked as he tied.

"Youngster," he said, "now that you're an overseer, let me tell you how you can keep little things like this from happenin' too often. Now in hirin' and firin'—"

"I'm not an overseer yet," said Holloway. "In fact, I think maybe if we saw the district superintendent—"

"I've seen plenty of him," bellowed Travis, as he pulled the noose tight around Malero's wrist. "I quit. I resigned. That's final. I don't change my mind."

"Listen, Travis," said Holloway. "Across the river this morning I mentioned to Don Carlos that you might quit the company. He told me he'd put you to work for him. When I came back, though, I decided I didn't want you around this part of the country, so I didn't pass on Don Carlos' offer. But just now— Well, how about being *mandador* for Don Carlos?"

Travis inspected the last knot, resumed his seat and took another drink of brandy.

"No more bananas for me," he said, wiping his mouth on the back of his hand. "Bananas is too tame, nowadays. A fella might just as well be growin' pansies, what with all the efficiency and writin' of budgets and reports. No, I been thinkin' for some time of headin' up into British Honduras. I hear they found gold on the Belize River."

TODAY'S RAW BRONC

As told by GIL STRICK *to* ALAN LEMAY

IT'S hard to figure out what smart people mean when they say that the old cow country has disappeared and taken the cow horse with it. Right now, in 1932, only about half of New Mexico is under private ownership, and only about a fifth of Arizona; and more than three-fourths of Nevada's half million cattle are on open range. And it seems like we are still making out to run a little scattering of stock, cow country or not.

The big change that has affected the cow horse is the use of branding chutes. It only took Western ingenuity about forty years to figure out that you could run a calf in a chute, and hold him by squeezing him with the side of a gate, some quicker than you could rope him, drag him, throw him down and hog-tie him. And this big discovery has cut the cow horse out of a lot of practise that used to make him look good.

But when you think of what little part of those three big Southwestern States is eligible to be fenced up, you see that the cow horse still has considerable room to work. And though most cowmen would like to see the open range split up some way, there is no sign of a get-together on how to split it fair; so it looks like we are going to have open range yet for some little while. Even the part that is fenced up runs anywhere from twenty-five to a hundred and fifty sections to the "pasture"—and a section is a square mile. You start out to work a bunch of cattle that is used to running loose in a pasture of a hundred square miles, and you are going to want a horse—a good one.

He is going to have endurance, together with bursts of pretty decent speed. He will have to pretty near jump out from under the saddle at a touch, and stop by sitting down—preferably with his front feet in the air—out of the dead run; and he isn't going to have any time to make turns, on dimes or otherwise—he must be ready to just suddenly be going the opposite way.

Without plenty of such cow horses, two or three men are not going to be able to sort out and divide up a bunch of a few hundred wild eyed range cattle, and get through in time to eat. And the cowboy is at all times anxious to eat.

So the cow horse is considered pretty important, and time and thought is put into keeping plenty of him on hand.

For an ideal cow horse you want to get in a certain amount of good blood. The Morgan blood is good because of the blocky build and its ability to keep up to snort. Arab blood means all horse, though Arabs have a name for being smart but stubborn; you see Arab blood in pintos, and personally I think that wilful Arab blood is responsible for the pinto's name of being a bone-head, which in my experience he is really not. But what a cowman is usually thinking of when he speaks of good blood is running-horse blood, something that can really explode out from under and stretch.

But at the same time you are going to have to keep plenty of good old cold range pony blood in your cow horse. For one thing, this horse is going to be foaled out on the open range, and spend the

big end of his life rustling for himself, through freeze and thaw, and the dry years. And another thing just as important is that he has got to be a sensible horse, willing to keep his mind steady on his work, and without the hot blooded craze to line out wide open, which you get when you breed for speed at all cost. And you have to keep away from the long thoroughbred back; a big, grade Hereford steer at the end of a rope can take a long backed horse and crack him like a whip.

All these things you think of when you are figuring to blood up your cow horse string a little bit by bringing in a stud. But having bred the colt, you turn around and forget about him; for he's going to get along the first year and a half or two years of his life with nothing to do with men at all, and if the bunch he is with is a little wild, maybe all you will see of him is just when you happen to be kicking him out of a gather of other horses.

What happens to him when he is about two years old is nothing to make him come up to the ranch and try to live in the house. At this age he will be gathered and brought to a large corral. He is a pretty salty little article by this time, and what he has for a mainspring is an unholy fear of anything strange. When he feels his first rope on his neck you'll see him fight as if he knows he's going to be hung for sure. The loop strangles him as it draws up, and he rears up with a yell like a mashed cat, fighting the rope with his front feet. Maybe he goes up in the air and comes down on his back, and gives himself a nosebleed, together with the leaping hysterics. Or at least that is the old way, without a branding chute.

With a branding chute all you have to do is run him in it and then close him up in the squeeze, which is very much like shutting a mouse up in a book; except that it is not painful, only very confining. In any case he is now gelded and branded, which is not what he has been led to expect from life. And after this series of surprises he is turned back on the range with the other weaning colts to think it over for a couple of years more, very little having been done to give him any big desire to join in the cow business, let alone any loyalty to the Democratic party.

Now see what you've got. Your horse is part hot-blood and part wild-running, take-care-of-yourself range stock; he has ranged free, rustling for himself all his life; and the only time he came up against any men, to his way of thinking he was done wrong by.

Now your next job is to take this colt and very quickly turn him into a cow horse who will move under you in the way you want to go just as prompt and willing as your own legs, but with more far reaching effect; who is sure to be standing there waiting for you when you have turned loose a thrown and hog-tied critter, who is now coming at you with no kind purpose in view; and who will be ready to start work any minute, and stay with it at least six miles after he is completely used up. And all this for very few dollars.

There are certain funny things in the colt's makeup which make it possible for you to do this, and other things about him which you have to some way get around. And you not only have to know which is which, but how much so, to the hair's breadth; always remembering that if a horse looks through the fence he is doing it for a different reason than you would look through the fence. And you can never figure that the horse would ever do anything which you would be likely to do in his place —except maybe come in to eat. A first class bronc rider—a man who can really make a cow horse—has generally put in most of his life figuring the bronc's queer twists.

And that is why when a bronc rider and a city man get together, neither one of them can see that the other knows a cussed thing, so far as can be found out.

A Novelette of the Apaches, in Paris and the Foreign Legion

GEOGRAPHICALLY, Ménilmontant is as much a part of Paris as the Place de l'Opéra. Socially, it is in another world—a black and bitter world of narrow streets flanked by dilapidated tenements, a world of outcasts and apaches and sordid vice.

But the denizens of Ménilmontant, though they live in squalor, like to relax and forget their miseries just as the bourgeois do. Their places of amusement would not appeal to the fastidious minded, nor can they be recommended to tourists who would a-slumming go. The tourist who would a-slumming go in Ménilmontant stands more than an even chance of waking up dead with three feet of strong twine wrapped around his neck. The district, according to its peculiar standards, is very exclusive.

Of all the establishments which cater to this select clientele, the Bal du Pétrin is by far the most notorious. Only the cream of the cream can get by the bouncers who mount guard by the cashier's desk. The dancehall is lighted by Chinese lanterns strung on wires across the ceiling. The effect is quite pretty, but the illumination, to say the least, is poor. It is so poor that, in the semi-obscurity, one gentleman may run a knife into another gentleman's vital organs without attracting much attention.

The music is provided by two piano-accordions and a violin. The *machiche* is not popular. The patrons prefer waltzes and tangos, with an occasional one-step thrown in for good measure.

It was close on eleven o'clock on a raw November night when Henri *le Requin* (the Shark) and Jules *l'Etudiant* (the Scholar) sauntered into the hall. They were typical young men of Ménilmontant: twenty, pasty faced, sharp featured, with a wary look in their eyes half hidden by the brims of greasy cloth caps. They wore workmen's coats of blue denim, pegtop corduroy trousers and canvas sandals with rope soles. They walked with a light, springy tread, as though at any second they anticipated trouble.

Just inside the doorway they paused and leaned against the wall. The place

A Man of Great Promise

By

J. D. NEWSOM

was packed. There was not an inch of standing room on the dance floor, where dubious couples swayed in slow time to the vibrant bellow of the accordions. The lanterns glowed hazily through a fog of tobacco smoke. The air stank of wine and perspiration and cheap perfume.

After awhile, the man whose name was Jules spoke around the butt end of the cigaret glued to his lower lip. He had the slurred, drawling voice of the gutter bred apache.

"It's good to be back. No hemp to pick at six tomorrow morning, my old one!"

Henri spat out of the corner of his mouth.

"Don't I know it! Ten months is a long time." He held up one hand and stared thoughtfully at his calloused fingertips. "Remember how they used to bleed before we got used to it?"

"I remember." Jules nodded. "They'll never get me again. Once is plenty."

A fat, sweating waiter with a white apron flapping around his legs brushed past them. Shoulder high, he held a trap loaded with glasses and bottles.

"Hey!" said Henri. "Maurice! Don't you recognize your old friends these days?"

The waiter slithered to a standstill.

"So you're out!" he exclaimed in an undertone. "I thought they handed you a full year."

Henri smiled—a mean, wolfish smile.

"Good behavior got us out. We're reformed characters. Tell me something. Are there any plainclothesmen hanging around tonight?"

"I haven't seen any."

"Fine! Tell me something else. Is Gonnard here?"

The waiter looked startled.

"Him? I don't know. . . . Maybe he is, but—"

"You don't know how to lie," Jules grinned. "Spit it out, Maurice. Who's he with?"

"I'm in a hurry," the waiter protested. "I can't keep my customers waiting."

"If that tray slips out of your hands," Henri pointed out, "*you* have to foot the bill. I'm here on business, Maurice. Let's have it quick. Who's Gonnard with?"

"Well—" the waiter cleared his throat—"he's over there on the other side of the room with Ninette."

He hurried away, balancing the platter high above his head.

"So it was your girl Gonnard was after!" Jules murmured. "Smart work!"

"It looks that way," admitted Henri. "But he's not going to feel so smart in another half hour."

SIDE by side, without haste, they worked their way around the dancehall. They found the man they were hunting sitting with a peroxide blonde near the orchestra platform. He was a red faced, beefy ruffian with a spitcurl in the middle of his forehead and tattoo marks on the backs of his hands—a ladykiller after Ménilmontant's own heart. The girl, whose painted mouth gaped like an open wound, was gazing soulfully into his eyes.

Henri tapped him on the arm.

"Come on," he said. "Outside."

The girl gave a startled cry which was covered by the tremolo of the accordions. Gonnard pushed back his chair. His right hand slid into his coat pocket.

"What do you want?" he snarled. "Ninette? You're out of luck. When a man is fool enough to get caught, and stays away the best part of a year—"

"I'm not talking about Ninette," Henri said gently. "I'm talking about you. I want you to come outside for a couple of minutes."

"What for?"

"Oh, just to be sociable and friendly, that's all."

"That's it," added Jules, standing close behind Gonnard's back. "We got some news for you from your dear old friend Commissaire Pichon of the Sûreté. He sends love and kisses to his esteemed colleague, Emile Gonnard, the nicest little stoolpigeon in the service."

"What the devil are you talking about!" sputtered Gonnard. "Pichon? I never heard of Pichon. You're crazy! You can't sling that kind of mud at me!"

The Shark leaned over and spoke in his ear:

"It's just too bad, Gonnard. Pichon gave the whole show away while he had us on the griddle."

"It's a lie!"

"Don't you believe it. You told him about the silk robbery in the Rue des Martyrs just to get rid of us—of me—because of Ninette."

The girl caught Gonnard by the wrist.

"Don't leave me," she begged. "I know that beast better than you do. He'll kill you."

He brushed her hand away and stood up.

"Don't you worry," he assured her. "It's not the first time my life has been threatened—but I'm still alive."

"Coming?" Henri insisted.

"I am!" swore Gonnard. "You're not going to run around this neighborhood telling everybody I'm a stoolpigeon."

"If it's all the same to you, we'll go out the back way." Jules smiled. "Two of your uniformed friends are standing by the front door. We don't want to have anything to do with them, do we, Monsieur the Informant?"

"The back way suits me," agreed Gonnard. He waved to the girl. "Wait for me. I'll be back in a couple of min-

utes, *ma poulette.*"

But, as he turned away, he looked straight into her eyes and nodded ever so slightly toward the main exit.

To reach the street they had to pass through a corridor so narrow that they had to go in single file. It was lighted by the naked flame of a gas jet sticking out of the brick wall.

Jules held open the door.

"Will Monsieur Gonnard be kind enough to step this way?" he said with elaborate politeness.

"And let you knife me in the back?" Gonnard retorted. "Not tonight or any other night. In you go, both of you."

"Just as monsieur wishes." Jules sighed. "Monsieur, I see, is not in a trusting mood."

He went in first, then came Henri. Gonnard waited until they were midway down the passage before following them. As he slammed the door, he whipped a long bladed knife from his pocket.

He rushed at Henri, but he was not quite quick enough. Henri spun around. In his hand he held an automatic. Gonnard drew himself up with a jerk, and Henri laughed at him.

"Yes, you dumb cow, it's a gun. You didn't think I was going to waste my time making buttonholes in your foul hide, did you?"

All the color had drained from Gonnard's face. Even his lips were gray as he sputtered:

"For God's sake, Henri, you're not going to shoot me! You can't!"

"No, of course not," jeered Henri. "You're the best friend I ever had. You denounced me to the police and stole my girl. That's what I call friendship."

Beads of perspiration trickled down Gonnard's quivering cheeks.

"You don't understand," he pleaded. "I couldn't help it. I had to tell them something. I didn't say much. They were trying to pin the Place Gambetta murder on me."

"What of it?" rasped Henri.

"And while you're about it," added Jules, "you might tell us something about Mathe. At Melun Prison, where we had the pleasure of spending such a delightful vacation, they say it is your evidence sent him to the guillotine."

"No!" said Gonnard, and his voice strangled in his throat. "I didn't say a word about him."

"And they say also that you helped the police send Pilloy to Guiana for twenty years."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Gonnard began. "I swear—"

And as he spoke, he slung the knife out of the palm of his hand straight at Henri's stomach. It missed its mark by a fraction of an inch. Henri saw it coming and flattened against the wall. The knife whistled past him, struck the wall, and clattered to the ground.

He fired twice. Gonnard fell to his knees. For a moment he swayed unsteadily, pressing his hands to his chest. His breath rattled in his blood clogged throat and a pink foam dribbled out of the corner of his twisted mouth.

The Shark kicked him in the face.

"Down, you pig! Stay down!"

He shoved the gun against Gonnard's ear and pulled the trigger once more.

From the dance hall came the strains of *Die Rosenkavalier,* played full blast by the accordions.

Hard eyed, Henri stared down at the corpse. With the toe of his canvas shoe he rolled the head sidewise.

"I hope Ninette likes your looks," he grunted. "If she opens her trap, she'll get the same dose."

Jules drew his cap down over his eyes and turned up his coat collar.

"Why don't you kiss it goodby," he demanded angrily. "Leave it alone. It's dead. What's the use of kicking it? Let's get out of here."

"I'll leave when I'm good and ready," snarled Henri, "and I'll kick his face to pieces if I feel like it. Dead or alive I hate him! But you—Oh, *mon dieu,* no! A little blood turns your stomach upside down. You're too lady-like and refined, that's what's the matter with

you. There's times when I'm surprised you don't get a job and settle down. You've got the guts of a rabbit."

"That's not it."

"That *is* it! I've known you a good long time, Julot. You're tough enough on the outside—but inside you're as soft as mush." He slipped the gun into his coat pocket. "*En route!* We'll shift across the way to Chicore's and have a drink. A drop of cognac will steady your delicate nerves."

OUTSIDE it was dark and rainy. A cold wind, biting through their thin clothes, made their teeth chatter. Round shouldered, bowing their heads to the rain, they hurried down the alleyway, keeping close to the wall.

They were not destined to reach Chicore's grog shop that night. Behind them, all at once, they heard the click-click-click of heels on the asphalt pavement.

A voice called out:

"Jules Verron and Henri Loiseau! Just one minute!"

As they glanced over their shoulders, a piercing scream rang out.

"They killed him, *les vaches!* They have murdered my man!"

Four men were closing in upon them. Four unmistakable agents of the Sûreté Générale, burly, thickset, big footed. In the background stood Ninette, shrieking like a factory whistle.

The leader of the plainsclothesmen covered the two apaches with a revolver.

"Might as well come quietly," he observed. "The game's up, *mes gars.* Gonnard's girl tipped us off."

He motioned to his subordinates.

"Slip the bracelets on to 'em. Quick!"

Few apaches carry guns. Their weapon is the *surin,* the long bladed knife which makes no noise and kills at close range even more surely than the bullet. It never entered the brigadier's head to order his prisoners to put their hands up. He paid for that oversight with his life.

Henri fired from his pocket. Shot through the heart, the brigadier went down like a board, flat on his face in the gutter.

"One!" said Henri. "You rat faced spittleskins, I'll pick no more of your hemp!"

A plainclothesman hurled a pair of handcuffs at Jules and leaped forward, trying to pin his arms to his side. Jules stepped out of reach, spun around and drove one foot into the pit of the policeman's stomach, doubling him up.

The two remaining agents had drawn their revolvers, and the fusillade started in earnest. Henri's gun was empty. He had no opportunity to reload. A bullet clipped the tip of his ear. A thread of blood trickled down his neck inside his shirt. He turned on his heel and ran.

Jules covered his retreat. Crouching behind a lamp post, resting the muzzle of his gun on the crook of his elbow to steady his aim, he dropped one of his antagonists with his third shot. The sole surviving agent decided that discretion was perhaps the better part of valor. He dodged into the passageway leading to the Bal du Pétrin—and there he stayed despite Ninette's curses.

Pocketing his gun, Jules sped down the alley. At the corner he found Henri waiting for him. By that time, a crowd of several hundred people, gathered at the top end of the street, was howling with delight at the defeat of the plainclothesmen. Policemen were trying to fight their way through the mob, but they made slow progress, for Ménilmontant is not afraid of a few *flics.* It takes half a company of gendarmes to quiet a riot up there.

Jules and Henri left the district in a hurry. It was no place for them. Before long, every detective, gendarme and stoolpigeon would be on their trail. Even as they ran, all Paris seemed to contract and grow small until it was no larger than a good sized mantrap. The rain swept streets were empty and sinister.

Still on the run, they came to the high stone wall enclosing the Père Lachaise cemetery, the last resting place of such great characters as Sarah Bernhardt and Oscar Wilde. At that hour it was a moderately safe sanctuary. They scrambled over the wall and groped their way among the vaults until they came to a flat tombstone. They swept some bead wreaths aside and sat down.

"We got him," panted Henri. "That's something. He won't tell any more tales."

Jules wiped the sweat and the rain off his face with his coat sleeve.

"We got him," he agreed, "but we also got Brigadier Lannec and Doucet and Riverrin. It smells bad, this business. They won't send us to Melun this trip. I don't care who you get as a lawyer, there's only one possible verdict." He drew the flat of his hand across his throat. "Deibler's* going to give us a close shave."

"Shut your trap, you fool!" snarled Henri. "It's no laughing matter. Name of God! That's the trouble with a gun. It makes killing too easy. Squeeze a trigger—*flack!* Down goes your man. With a knife you have to be more careful." He took the automatic from his pocket and hurled it through the night. "All this wouldn't have happened if I'd had a knife. And I spent my last sou on that damned cannon!"

"Ifs aren't going to get us anywhere," Jules pointed out. "What's done is done. We might as well face it. Gonnard—a jury might have been lenient. But we don't stand a chance with the brigadier in his coffin. It's Deibler or Guiana or—"

"Or what?"

Jules gave a low chuckle.

"It's an idea. It's a great idea. *Sapristi,* do you remember Horodinski at the prison—the old bird with one arm?"

"What about him? Talk straight, for God's sake." He hammered his knee with his clenched fist. "I'm glad I killed Gonnard! Stealing my girl, the *salopard!* And those cops. Good riddance! What do I care? They've never given me a chance, the dirty devils!" His fit of despair died down. "What about Horodinski?" he demanded. "Where does he fit in?"

"He was next to me in the workroom. Do you know how he lost his arm? He was in the Foreign Legion years ago. In the Dahomey campaign his outfit was attacked by a whole flock of wild women—regular soldiers, he swears they were. Amazons he called them. One of 'em sliced his arm off at the elbow. But it's a great life in the Legion, so he said."

Henri cut him short.

"I've heard all about the Legion. They put you in uniform and sweat hell out of you, digging ditches and making roads in the desert. And a bunch of Prussian sergeants to kick you in the seat of the pants if you so much as bat an eyelash. That's not my idea of a good time."

The wind whistled through the bare branches of the trees and the rain beat down upon their backs.

"All right," said Jules. "Just think of something else, will you? Go ahead, bright boy. What's on your mind? So far as I can make out it's the Legion or Deibler. And we're not in the Legion yet. It's a long way from here to the recruiting office in the Rue des Dominicains. And even then we won't be safe until we reach Africa." He beat his heels against the side of the tomb. "Think of it, lots of sunshine and Arab girls—"

"Dream on! And how about forming fours, and saluting, and marching, and fighting? It's the sort of thing you would suggest! Even when you were a kid you were crazy about the army—because your old man was a sergeant-major! Huh! A lot of good it did him. Him and his medals. He had to pawn 'em before he was through to get enough to eat." Angrily he shrugged his shoulders. "But you're right, confound you! It's our one chance. I'm with you. The Legion can't be worse than Melun and Melun is better than the guillotine.

*Deibler: Official executioner.

I'll be a fool soldier if we can reach the recruiting office. It's on the other side of Paris. In these clothes, we'll be picked up before we've gone half a mile."

"Paris is full of clothes," Jules pointed out. "All we have to do is take them off the first bourgeois we meet. Choose your own style: Montmartre for dinner coats, St. Lazare for readymade suits, l'Etoile for the well groomed clubman. You never can tell. We might annex a couple of furlined coats."

"Why not top hats and spats?" Henri inquired disgustedly. "You'll be cracking jokes with Deibler if you aren't careful. Let's get out of here. It must be nearly one o'clock. Everybody will be home and in bed if we don't make a move."

Later that night, two woebegone Belgian gentlemen, clad in nothing more substantial than gooseflesh and rain, tottered into the police station of the 14th District. They were very cold and very indignant, and they swore that Paris was a city of brigands. Even their underwear had been stolen—not to mention their wallets which contained the innumerable papers, permits and passports which every law abiding Belgian citizen is in duty-bound to carry wherever he goes.

At break of day, the skipper of a sandbarge on the Seine River found two pairs of corduroy trousers, a couple of blue denim coats and an assortment of dirty linen lying beneath the Henri IV Bridge. He made a bundle of the garments and carried them on board his ship.

"They are almost new," he told his wife. "All they need is a good washing. Corduroy wears like iron. Those pants will come in handy when we're unloading."

And at eight o'clock the same morning, two young men rode up in a taxi to the recruiting office in the Rue des Dominicains. One of them wore a waterproof trenchcoat, the other an overcoat of blue ratine. Their clothes looked rather roomy, and they walked with a mincing gait, due to the fact that their shoes fitted a shade too snugly.

The recruiting sergeant accepted them at their face value. He asked but three questions: Age, name and nationality. At a stroke of the pen Jules the Scholar became Jules Blaisot, a native of Charleroi in Belgium, and Henri the Shark became Henri Fourment of Poelcappelle, also in Belgium. The sergeant believed them implicitly. It would have been impossible to find a more incurious man.

Before the clock struck ten, they had signed on the dotted line and were an integral part of the French Foreign Legion. They were not fingerprinted, nor were they compelled to produce any evidence in support of their statements, for the Legion is not interested in the antecedents of its recruits. Provided they are sound of wind and limb it guards them jealously and shields them from the outside world more effectively than if they were behind prison bars.

THE great powers have never waged a colonial war, nor subjugated their backward brethren, nor annexed barbarous countries for the mere sake of loot. No, most certainly not! Perish the horrible thought!

Whenever they have been compelled to assume the white man's burden, they have done so in the name of peace, of progress, of humanity, of civilization. Their corporate souls are lily white. Their aim is to uplift and educate. They are altruists, every one of them. They have done great things. They have wrought miracles. The industrial age has been wished upon ignorant, slothful peoples who were stupid enough to have few wants and who were content to live in ignorance of the beauties of compound engines, dynamos and sanitary plumbing.

These lazy savages have been made to appreciate the glory of toil in roaring factories and in mines where safety devices are considered effete. They have been taught the pure joy of conscripted gang labor, of starvation wages, of the

overseer's whip. And if they refuse to be modernized, if they declare that they want to be their own masters in their own homes, if they prefer to stagnate instead of joining in the forward march of progress, then they are called fanatics, and shot.

Occasionally, however, these backward races produce a leader endowed not only with courage and faith, but with enough brains to fight the white man with a white man's weapons.

Such a man was Abd el Krim, lord of the hills of the Riff. He failed, but he served his purpose. The lesson will not be forgotten. Some day, another Abd el Krim will arise.

After months and years of preparation, he struck his first blow against the Spaniards in northern Morocco. At Aroual he scored a victory which made him famous from Fez to Calcutta. One hundred and twenty pieces of artillery, rifles by the thousand and millions of cartridges fell into his hands. Before long, in the Riff, he had an army of fifteen thousand men equipped with modern rifles and machine guns. He erected observation posts overlooking the lush valley of the Mahgreb, and field telephones linked these posts to his headquarters. With the four million pesetas the Spaniards paid to ransom their prisoners of war, he built bridges and roads, and hired foreign advisers. He was the greatest of all menaces, a rebel with modern equipment.

The Riff was on fire. Along the border the work of the French political officers crumbled to dust. Every Arab who could handle a gun went over to Abd el Krim.

There were not half enough troops on hand to avert the crisis. General Lyautey's hands were tied by diplomatic red tape. He was forbidden to go into the Riff and smother the impending onslaught. He was compelled to mark time on his side of the border in the marshy plain of the Ouerga and wait for Abd el Krim to choose his own time.

For political reasons, no regiments could be expected from France. One war had just ended. Ministers and deputies preferred to lose Morocco rather than the life of another French private. Lyautey was ordered to "make adequate defense preparations" with the troops at his disposal—Senegalese Tirailleurs, Chasseurs d'Afrique, Colonial Infantry and Legionnaires—who, if and when they died, would not cause any sorrow in the homes of France.

Every available soldier at the depot of the Legion at Sidi bel Abbes was shoved into Morocco, soldiers with three months' training—men like Jules Blaisot and Henri Fourment, fresh from the awkward squad.

They reached the Bou Amara Pass in late January at the height of the rainy season, and were put to work with pick and shovel making a ten-foot road through the hills.

And they worked as they had never worked before, from dawn till darkness, in the sleet and the mud, quarrying stone out of the hillside, carting stone in hand barrows, cracking stone, pounding stone into the sodden earth. They lived in flimsy tents in a valley where the wind howled and the rain poured through the rotten canvas. The bread they ate was green with mold, the water thick with mud. They were never dry; they were never warm. Their shoes mildewed on their feet.

They knew little or nothing of the impending attack. They discounted the mild rumors they picked up in the grog shops on the outskirts of the camp. A nigger was going to attack the French army! What next? The whole business was a put up job to make them work like slaves. There were no old soldiers among them. The detachment, sixty strong, was made up of recruits drawn from every gutter and slum in Europe, from Berlin and Warsaw, Prague and Antwerp—and Ménilmontant. Discipline, the iron discipline of the Legion, had not had time to bite into their souls. They were used to congested city streets, to tenements full to overflowing. With-

out transition, they were pitchforked into a bleak wilderness of red cliffs and mud. The sight of the cloud wrapped hills did not fill them with awe, it filled them with intense disgust.

"The prison at Melun was no worse than this," swore Fourment, the Shark. "Name of a cow, the roof didn't leak and the food was eatable. Look at us now —sergeants yelling at us, 'Get on, keep moving, fill that barrow!' That lousy Geiger! I'd like to tickle his tonsils with the point of a bayonet. Calling me a lazy swine because I won't carry two tons of rock at each trip. To hell with the army! Coolies! That's all we are."

Blaisot was not so sure. A queer change had come over him since he had reached Africa—a change he would not admit even to himself. Of course he despised his officers, and all sergeants were brutes. But for some unaccountable reason he was on the brink of falling in love with the army as though he were a white collared bourgeois.

It began the first time the regimental flag was brought out to the parade ground at the depot. The sight of that bullet torn rag sent a chill racing down his spine. He felt like a fool, but he could not help it. Not that he associated the flag with any highfalutin nonsense about patriotism or duty or sacrifice. It stood for something much more personal. Literally, it had saved him from the guillotine. Behind its folds, he was free from the everlasting menace of the hand dropping on his shoulder and the voice saying, "The game's up, my boy. Deibler's waiting to cut your hair."

There were other things, too, that got under his skin: the brassy voice of the bugles, the rolling thunder of drums, the crisp rattle of rifles leaping to the "present." He was careful, however, to keep his thoughts to himself.

He didn't take any more kindly to Bou Amara than Fourment or the other recruits, but it seemed to him that there must be some explanation of the hardships he was undergoing. Everybody was suffering, even the officers.

The explanation was offered him late one afternoon as he trudged back to camp with a pick over his shoulder. He was alone on the road, for the sergeant had detailed him to make sure that no tools were left behind.

He heard the clatter of hoofs coming up the valley. Horses meant officers, but he didn't give a curse. He was too tired to care. Humpbacked, dragging his feet, he slouched along by the roadside, until a voice sang out—

"Hey there, Legionnaire, one minute!"

Blaisot looked up. The next instant he was standing at attention, stiff as a ramrod, staring up into the face of the great man, the resident-general—a tall, slender man with a thick white mustache. Behind him was a group of gaudy staff officers and a detachment of Spahis in scarlet cloaks.

"You belong to No. 7 detachment, I suppose," said the resident. "What's your name, *mon ami?*

Blaisot was not in the habit of conversing with resident-generals. He had to make several attempts before he managed to blurt out the name.

"You've done great work!" the resident went on. "Splendid work. I know it's hard, but we must be ready when the crash comes. In a few weeks this road will be choked with guns and convoys and ambulances. Do you realize that? Abd el Krim will be down out of his hills as soon as the weather clears. You won't be wielding a pick much longer."

He leaned over, holding out his hand.

"You're straight from the depot, I'm told. How do you like the Legion?"

"Fine!" stammered Blaisot.

"You're a liar," chuckled the resident, "but you'll get used to it. Supplies will be coming through more regularly now. You'll have new boots in a couple of days and no more moldy bread. Goodby and good luck to you, Legionnaire."

He shook hands as though he meant it, then turned about and rode off with his impressive escort.

BLAISOT was still slightly dazed when he crawled into the tent.

A cigaret stub glowed in the twilight. It lighted up Fourment's pinched, gray face. Beside him, curled up in their wet blankets, two men were fast asleep and snoring.

"I thought you'd never get here," snorted Fourment. "Most of the gang's gone out. First thing you know, you'll be mounting extra guards for the fun of it! What kept you?"

Blaisot grinned.

"Me and the resident-general had a few words. He—"

Fourment dismissed the incident with a curse.

"That cow! They said he was cruising around. *Tu parles!* That's another one whose temperature I wouldn't mind lowering."

"What's he done to you?"

"Plenty. Why doesn't he put a gang of Senegalese to work making roads instead of us? Why? Because we're a pack of imbeciles. To hell with him!"

"Don't take off your shoes," he went on, lowering his voice. "We're going out."

"Not I," declared Blaisot. *"Je suis crevé*—I'm dead. What's more, I'm broke."

"Don't worry about that," whispered Fourment. "I'll get you all the drinks you want. Never mind where. You'll find out when we get there. Something's up, something big."

"Found a girl?"

"Oh, women!" Fourment shrugged. "Who cares for women? I can't talk now—too dangerous. You can't tell who's hanging around on the other side of the canvas."

"When did all this happen?" inquired Blaisot.

"Last night while you were asleep. Contelli and that Yankee Tennant are in on it. We slipped out after lights out. They're waiting for us. *Dégrouilles-toi!*"

There were no dress regulations for them to bother about at Bou Amara. Everything they owned was in rags. The sergeant on duty by the gap in the barbed wire fence surrounding the camp did not challenge them, though their canvas uniforms were covered with red slime. As they went by, he held a lantern close to their bearded, unclean faces. His one comment was:

"Sapristi! I would not be tranquil if I met you coming around a dark corner. Why, you're enough to frighten Abd el Krim's whole army!"

They had learned enough about the Legion to make them wary of wise-cracking sergeants. They kept their mouths tight shut and presently, when he ran short of ideas, he dismissed them.

"This gate closes at eight," he warned. "Any man not in camp on the dot is an absentee, and I don't mind telling you that it's very unhealthy to be an absentee when on active service."

"The dumb brute!" grunted Fourment as soon as they were out of earshot. "I'd rather plug him than Abd el Krim's men. They haven't done anything to me. It's a crazy business. Kill a *flic,* and they send you to the guillotine. Kill a man who's fighting for his home, and they hang medals on you. If I had my way—"

The shadowy figure of a man brushed past him in the darkness, and after that he kept his thoughts to himself.

"We can talk later," he declared. "It's not safe out here."

They came to a flimsy shack built of packing cases and kerosene cans. It stood close to the banks of the *oued,* where the rain swollen torrent roared over a bed of boulders.

"One-eyed Moreno's!" commented Blaisot. "I thought his dump was out of bounds."

"What of it? If you don't want to come in, you don't have to." He thrust his sharp, ferret face within an inch of Blaisot's nose. "What's come over you, Julot? You don't act like yourself these days."

"Maybe not," admitted Blaisot. "I'm too tired to think. Just dumb, that's

all. If we're going in, *allons-y.*"

A thread of light glimmered beneath the door. Fourment tapped gently on the panel. The light went out. Somebody spoke in a scarcely audible undertone.

"Who's there?"

"Me—Fourment. Blaisot is with me."

Hinges creaked. A hand caught Blaisot by the sleeve and drew him inside. Then a match sputtered and One-eyed Moreno stood before them. He was a scrawny, yellow skinned man with a mop of frizzy black hair. Over his right eye he wore a flesh colored celluloid patch. He was not handsome.

He held the match to a candle stuck in the neck of a bottle.

"Any more coming?" he inquired.

"Who did you expect?" growled Fourment. "The lieutenant and a couple of sergeants?"

Moreno shrugged his shoulders.

"Sit down. I'll see if I can find something for you to drink. Keep quiet, eh? Very quiet. Some gendarmes passed by not ten minutes ago."

At a table in the middle of the room sat two Legionnaires. Blaisot squeezed in beside Tennant, a lean, hatchet faced man, who shoved a bottle at him.

"Firewater," he explained in abominable French. "Good for the melancholia, *oui, oui. Gesundheit!*"

"This stuff costs money," muttered Blaisot, sniffing the contents of the bottle. "It's real rotgut! Who's paying for it, anyway?"

Tennant held a finger to his lips.

"Ssh! Don't talk—drink. That's the truest thing Plato ever said. Great man, Plato. 'O men of Athens,' he said, 'whenever the drinks are on the house, then should you ask no question, but imbibe till your wisdom teeth float in a sea of anchovies.' That's a literal translation."

Stretching out a long arm he reached down the table and helped himself to a bottle which by rights belonged to Contelli, a black bearded Sicilian.

"Eh! *Santa Madonna!*" exclaimed Contelli, his eyes flashing fire. "Give me my wine, camel that thou art."

Tennant handed back the empty bottle.

"Let us be calm," he urged. "In the words of the immortal Rabelais, 'Wine is for children, whereas cognac warms the warrior's heart.' Moreno won't let you die of thirst. He is a friend—"

The words died away on his lips, for at that moment Moreno leaned across the table and snuffed out the candle.

A GUST of cold air entered the room. Blaisot's ear caught the jingle of spurs.

A strange voice said sharply, "*Prestissimo!* Quick—a light. *Tcha!* I can not stand the blackness. So slow! So slow, like a donkey, Moreno."

Before Moreno could strike a match, the newcomer switched on an electric torch. Its blinding light swept across the Legionnaires' faces.

"Four," counted the man. "Is that all?"

"That is all," Moreno said humbly.

His hand shook as he held a match to the candle's wick.

The man marched up to the table. He was everything the Legionnaires were not—spruce, straightbacked, smart. He had insolent black eyes and a thin, contemptuous mouth. A black cloak, fastened around his neck with a gold clasp, hung down to his spurred heels. Over one ear he wore a red fez.

"There's been too much drinking," he snapped. He pointed to the bottles. "Take this stuff away, all of it. Take this, too." He tossed the cloak at Moreno. "Hang it up to dry. Careful of the lining."

He pulled off his leather gauntlets and flung them on the table.

"Fourment and Contelli—I know you. Glad to see you. Who are your friends?"

They told him. He greeted Tennant and Blaisot with a nod.

"Now then," he went on, "business. Quick, eh? It is a bad place, this. You listen to me." He stared into Blaisot's

eyes. "You know who I am? You have been told? Quick, answer! Did Fourment tell you anything about me?"

"Not a word," said Blaisot.

Instinctively he resented the man's arrogant manner, his tight fitting black tunic with the polished silver buttons, his manicured fingernails.

"Good! He had orders not to speak. For the present, I am the commandant, that's all. The commandant—you understand? *Va bene!* Now—" he cleared his throat—"you are Legionnaires. It is bad, yes, very bad. You are sick and hungry. The French, they treat you like beasts. You want to get out of it."

"Who said so?" inquired Blaisot.

The commandant glared at him.

"Sure he wants to get out," Fourment broke in, kicking Blaisot under the table. "Go on—tell him the rest of it."

"Not until he has spoken." The commandant darted a long forefinger at Blaisot. "Quick! Answer me. Do *you* like the Legion—the kicks and the abuse—the bad food? You are not such an imbecile, I hope."

"I hope not," agreed Blaisot. "What next?"

"Then you are the man I want," the commandant asserted. "I offer you freedom, money, a chance to get even with the French. They can't hold Morocco. No. Impossible!" He repeated the word, drawing it out in a long hiss. "Impossible. Their power will crumble at the first rush. And when that moment comes you want to be in the right camp."

By degrees Blaisot pieced the staccato sentences together. This imperious young man was a secret agent of Abd el Krim. He wanted the Legionnaires to go over to the rebels. They would be given the rank of sergeant-instructor and be paid fifty francs a day. When their services were no longer required, they would receive a bonus of five thousand francs and free passage to any port in Europe.

And the more he talked, the more Blaisot despised him. He seemed to think he could buy Legionnaires as if they were sheep or pigs, at so much a head.

"But I must have more men," he declared. "Four is not enough for my purpose. It is a nucleus, yes, but I can not go back with less than ten men. That will make a big hole in the ranks. Mass desertion. Yes. The news will spread like bushfire. Think of the moral effect on the native regiments, eh? White soldiers fighting for Abd el Krim! It will be devastating!"

Blaisot's heart was beating like a triphammer against his ribs, and his throat was dry as dust.

He could not put his thoughts into words. He could only hate—hate the lousy "spaghetti" who imagined Legionnaires could be hired to do his bidding.

The others were lapping up what he said. Five thousand francs was a fortune to men who were paid twenty-five centimes a day: one quarter of a franc.

"You mean it?" Contelli inquired breathlessly. "It is not a *blague,* a joke?"

The commandant silenced him with an imperious gesture.

"I deal in facts." The words popped like bullets between his small white teeth. "Before tomorrow night you must find at least six more men. For each man you bring, I will give a reward of one hundred francs—cash."

"It's going to be a stampede." Tennant laughed. "We'll bring the whole detachment."

"*Va bene!* For tonight that is all. Meet me tomorrow at the same hour. Here. With every man you can trust. That's clear, is it?"

"We'll be here," promised Fourment.

The commandant nodded impatiently. The interview obviously was at an end. He beckoned to Moreno, who was hovering in the background.

"Put out the light. You will file out one by one at two minute intervals so as not to attract attention. I shall give the signal. First, Blaisot. Off you go—in silence, eh? Good night! The others stand fast."

BLAISOT groped his way cautiously down the trail. Twenty paces carried him out of sight of the grog shop. Abruptly he swerved away from the path. A grayish mass loomed out of the blackness. Boulders. On hands and knees he crept behind the obstacle.

After awhile Tennant went by, humming beneath his breath. An inch at a time, Blaisot crawled back toward the house, feeling his way over the loosely piled stones. The blackness pressed up against his face like a velvet mask.

He gained a yard—another—then he froze in his tracks. Contelli hurried by in quick, short strides, cursing softly when his feet splashed in mud filled puddles. On again. He was so near the house when Fourment left, that he heard the whispered words:

"*À demain soir!* Till tomorrow night."

Then the door closed. It remained shut a long time—so long that Blaisot, flat on his belly by the wall, wondered whether he had missed his man.

He hadn't. His ear caught the scrape of a key in a lock. The commandant stepped across the threshold.

Blaisot heard the tag end of a phrase:

"Tomorrow night it will be finished. A stout heart, Moreno. We teach these French a lesson, eh? Go in! Go in! I can find my own way. Good night!"

The commandant crossed the path and headed straight for the hills. Beneath his cloak, his hand rested on the butt end of a revolver—but he never had a chance to use it.

He did not hear a sound. Something brushed past his face. A handkerchief scraped over his chin and grew taut around his neck, strangling him. At the same instant, Blaisot drove one knee into the small of his victim's back.

In Ménilmontant, where it is widely practised, it is called the *coup du Père François*. It worked equally well that night in the Bou Amara Pass. The commandant went over backward and, as he fell, his head came into violent contact with a lump of rock. When he revived sufficiently to take an intelligent interest in his surroundings, his arms were pinioned behind his back, and Blaisot's handkerchief was tied across his mouth.

His position was far from comfortable. Several stones were boring into the small of his back and his head ached abominably. When he moved, Blaisot, who was squatting close beside him, remarked:

"If it's all the same to you, Signor Spaghetti, we'll be on our way."

"Pig," said the commandant, speaking with difficulty through the folds of the handkerchief. "Foul pig of a Legionnaire—"

"Maybe so. But this pig is not for sale," explained Blaisot. "Not for five thousand or five million francs."

"Apache!" jeered his prisoner. "A dirty handed murderer, hiding behind a uniform."

"I'm not hiding behind it," Blaisot protested. "I'm in it."

He wanted to tell the commandant that he was proud of being a Legionnaire—but he didn't know how to go about it.

"Just because we're dirty and cold you thought we were easy marks," he said indignantly. "A lot *you* know about this outfit. Get up! Captain Lelong will be glad to make your acquaintance. Maybe he'll desert too. Think of the moral effect!"

The Italian was a good loser. Though he was still in a daze, he marched down the road erect and square shouldered, holding his head high in the air.

As soon as they reached the gate in the barbed wire fence, Blaisot's troubles began. He was not received like a conquering hero. There were no cheers, no plaudits, no praise. The first man he met was the sergeant of the guard, a choleric individual who seemed convinced that Blaisot had brought a prisoner back to camp for the sole purpose of annoying his superior officers.

"An agitator," he grumbled, holding his lantern up to the commandant's white face. "My God, of all things—at this hour of the night. Now I'll have to wallow about through the mud and

wake up the adjutant. And my confounded boots have just been cleaned too! How do you know he's an agitator?"

"He offered me five thousand francs if I'd desert," said Blaisot.

The sergeant's eyes grew as round as a saucer. His mustache bristled.

"And you didn't accept? You'll have to have your head examined. Still, that's none of my business. Wait here until I can find the adjutant."

They waited a long time. It was cold and windy and wet. The men on picket duty stood beneath the awning of the guard tent and made facetious remarks about Blaisot and his prisoner.

"They'll give him a medal," one of them declared. "He'll look pretty with a bit of hardware dangling on his chest."

"Medals!" exclaimed another trooper, who spoke with a strong German accent. "He ought to be awarded a halo. Think of turning down five thousand francs! He's a saint."

"If I had my way I'd pin a medal on the seat of his pants," added a towheaded Fleming. "Then I'd let the detachment use it as a target at rifle practice. If he didn't want a gold mine, why didn't he turn it over to me? I could have used it."

PRESENTLY the sergeant returned, accompanied by the adjutant. And the adjutant, too, was in a bad temper because he had been dragged away from a perfectly good game of *manille* (he was two hundred points up and held the queen of spades) to deal with this extraordinary case.

He shot questions at Blaisot.

"Where did you meet this man? Where? At One-eyed Moreno's! Don't you know that grog shop is out of bounds? Sacred thousand thunders! There's no discipline in this detachment, none! We'll see what the captain has to say about this! Now, the prisoner—"

He glared at the commandant.

"We'll have to do something about this. Nuisance. Damned nuisance. Never any peace. The whole thing's irregular. Who else was with you at Moreno's? Speak up!"

Blaisot hesitated for one fraction of a second.

"I was alone, Monsieur the Adjutant," he declared.

"That rascal Fourment was with you!"

"I was alone," repeated Blaisot.

The adjutant yanked the gag out of the commandant's mouth.

"Is that right? Was this man alone? Did you have any dealings with anybody else?"

The Italian smiled blandly through the mud and the blood on his face.

"If this Legionnaire says he was alone, then he was alone. It is not my place, Monsieur the Adjutant, to disprove his statement. I assure you that he is incorruptible." He bowed toward Blaisot. "A little while ago, I called you an apache. I apologize. You have the makings of an honorable man."

Blaisot could have dispensed with this indorsement. He was feeling uncomfortable enough. The men on picket duty had to fight hard to keep from breaking into howls of laughter. Blaisot the incorruptible! Blaisot the man of honor! He felt like kicking his prisoner.

Stung by the commandant's words, the adjutant was hopping about like a flea on a hot griddle.

"Trying to tell me what to do! A damned spy! We're getting nowhere. The captain can conduct his own investigation. Fall in, four men. Prisoner and escort. Right turn—forward!"

So they came at last to another tent lighted by an acetylene bicycle lamp, where Captain Lelong awaited them. He was a lean, weatherbeaten man with cold blue eyes and a closely clipped gray beard. The heat generated by the acetylene lamp made the air in the tent steam like a Turkish bath.

By that time Blaisot was devoutly wishing he had gone over to the rebels. It would have been less complicated.

In stony silence the captain listened

to the adjutant's report. Then he turned to Blaisot and snapped:

"Now let's hear your story. Make it short, my boy."

Blaisot made it almost painfully short: Moreno's—the meeting—the arrest.

Lelong ran his fingers through his beard.

"I see—thank you. Good work. Of course, it is a pity you went out of bounds. Still—" a faint twinkle crept into his eyes—"perhaps in this instance we can afford to be lenient. I'll have to think it over.

"And you, monsieur," he turned to the commandant— "Have you anything to say in your defense?"

The Italian gave his shoulders an eloquent shrug.

"Not a thing, Monsieur the Captain —except that the spirit of your men—" he checked himself—"of *some* of your men is very fine. I had been led to believe the contrary."

"Um. Queer fish, Legionnaires. By the way, you—ah—know what to expect?"

Again the Italian smiled.

"Needless to say, I know exactly what to expect, monsieur. It is a matter of minor importance."

Death, violent and brutal death, was not new to Blaisot. But in his mind it had always been associated with curses and yells and—in the end—with groveling horror. He could not understand Lelong and the commandant. They talked about death courteously and dispassionately as though it were as inconsequential as a toothache. Their attitude made him feel mean and small.

"I take it," Lelong was saying, "that at one time you were an officer, monsieur."

"At one time," admitted the Italian, "I was an officer, monsieur."

"I thought as much. Perhaps you would care for a cigaret and a cup of coffee? I'm afraid I'll have to keep you waiting until daybreak. It is still a long way off."

The Italian bowed from the hips.

"I would be delighted, monsieur."

Lelong motioned to the adjutant.

"Detail a firing squad to stand by at reveille. Blaisot will report at orderly room at 7:30. That's all for tonight. You may dismiss."

THE adjutant barked a string of orders, exerting so much lung power that he almost shattered Blaisot's eardrums. As soon as they were out of the tent, however, the noncom's manner became more confidential.

"You think you're smart, don't you?" he grunted. "You think you're a fine fellow. A little tin god on wheels. Wait till tomorrow morning, *mon garçon!* He didn't want to say much in front of that comic opera spy, the captain didn't, but he's not the man to forget this sort of thing."

"What sort of thing?"

"Breaking bounds, of course."

"I caught a spy by breaking bounds."

"Sacred name of a little sausage! How dare you argue with me, *salopard?* Hyena! Crapulous bandit! Your spy, he is of no importance. If you had not visited Moreno's, you would not have met him. That is as clear as the azure sky. And if you had not met him, he would not have been in a position to offer you five thousand francs for your services. Consequently, you not only disobeyed an order, but you are to blame if tomorrow morning twelve men have to be taken off road construction to shoot this specimen of an agitator. You are a Legionnaire, not a member of the secret service. Never let this happen again! *Allez!*"

It was a point of view Blaisot had not taken into consideration. The future looked black. It looked blacker than ever when, after leaving the adjutant, he came upon Fourment, Tennant and Contelli waiting for him close to the barbed wire fence which he had to skirt to reach his tent.

They did not have much to say, but he gathered that they disapproved of

his conduct just as much as the adjutant did, although their reasons were somewhat different.

A long arm reached out of the darkness, caught him by the collar of his tunic, and throttled him. Above the roar of the blood in his ears he heard Tennant say—

"I thought you had enough sense to mind your own business."

He tried to twist away, but Tennant lifted him clear off his feet and jammed him up against the barbed wire. The spikes bit into his flesh.

"Rip out his black heart," Fourment urged in a rasping undertone.

"And run the risk of getting myself shot? Certainly not! This Judas isn't worth killing."

Contelli was shuffling about on the sidelines, aiming tentative blows at Blaisot's groin.

"No!" he protested violently. "Kill him! He will talk."

"He won't," said Tennant. "He's a poor damn fool with a swollen head, but he won't talk." His fist smashed against Blaisot's jaw. "Another time he'll have sense enough not to butt in."

He shook Blaisot as a terrier shakes a rat.

"D'you hear what I'm saying? Because of you, I've got to stay in this outfit. I got to go on drawing twenty-five centimes a day, when I could have picked up five thousand francs."

Another blow flattened out Blaisot's nose and drove his head back against the wire. His face dripped blood. They hit him high and they hit him low, pounding him to a pulp. When Tennant let go his stranglehold, he crumpled up and they kicked him till his ribs cracked.

Fourment, his eyes glowing like live coals, drew his bayonet.

"Why not?" he asked.

Tennant caught him by the arm.

"I told you why not. This bird's more dangerous dead than alive."

"*C'est bon,*" grunted Fourment, sliding the bayonet back into its scabbard.

He gave Blaisot one last kick.

"We'll settle this some other time," he whispered. "Just the two of us—you damned soldier!"

Blaisot remained blissfully unaware of the threat. Hours went by. A downpour of rain swept over the camp, drenching him to the skin. He stirred uneasily and a stab of pain shot like fire through his veins. Then, dimly, he heard the sound of voices. He was picked up and carried a long distance. A hot pungent liquid was poured into his mouth: coffee with a little cognac in it. It burned his puffy lips. Afterward he dozed off into a troubled sleep.

A crash like a clap of thunder brought him sitting bolt upright. He was lying on a stretcher in the infirmary. In the doorway, on a three legged stool, sat a medical orderly.

"What was that?" Blaisot inquired hoarsely. "I heard a noise!"

The orderly smothered a yawn.

"So you've come to life!" he commented. "Yes, you heard a noise, don't you fret. Your friend, the commandant, has just been given twelve pretty little bullets to play with on his way to heaven."

"They shot him?"

"Sounds very much like it, unless they're using blank cartridges. You didn't expect the captain to kiss and make up, did you?"

He heaved himself off the stool and stared down at Blaisot.

"Who fixed you up that way? They certainly did a thorough job of it."

Blaisot shook his head. It was nobody's business who had beaten him up. He could settle his private affairs without outside aid.

"Nobody. I don't know. It was so dark I couldn't see."

"Well, it's none of my business, *mon pote*. I do not care. By the way, here is a bit of news for you. I picked it up from the regimental clerk. The old man's so pleased with you he's giving you a couple of green sardines* to put on your arm."

*Stripes

"No!" gulped Blaisot.

"It's the truth. Two stripes. You'll be a corporal when you get off that stretcher."

Blaisot tried to get off it then and there.

"Lie down!" commanded the orderly. "No use getting excited. You aren't the first man who's ever been made a corporal—nor the last. Keep quiet, confound you. You've got a couple of broken ribs and you'll be in here for the next four or five days. That'll give you plenty of time to get used to it."

EVERY one knew that Abd el Krim meant to make a dash for Fez as soon as the rains stopped. But no one, not even the professional pessimist, was prepared for the murderous efficiency of his first onslaught.

A southwest wind had blown the clouds out of the sky. The sun shone and the earth steamed. On the lower slopes of the hills, oleander bloomed white and pink, a riot of clear bright colors. Overnight, rushing torrents became little streams threading their way circumspectly around great boulders which a few hours earlier they had rolled about like pebbles.

The Legiomaires in the Bou Amara Pass went to work as usual, making a passage for the guns across the bed of the torrent. Up the road they had built, convoys with supplies of food and shells and clothing were coming into camp, which was destined to become an important base depot when the fighting began. A colonel by the name of Descourt had taken over command, and fresh troops were beginning to arrive. Camp-fires smoked in the clear morning air. A pleasant sense of leisurely activity pervaded the valley.

"There's plenty of time," clicked the slow moving hoofs on the road.

"Plenty of time," echoed the picks and the shovels at the ford.

It was good to be dry and warm again, to work stripped to the waist with the sun on one's back, to feel cramped muscles relax.

And then, almost unnoticed in the hustle and bustle, a Spahi patrol clattered into camp. Six kilometers away, up the Bou Amara Pass, so said the patrol leader, snipers had fired upon his party. Pushing forward a little farther, he had stumbled upon a machine gun nest and had lost four men.

He had not seen any large concentration of enemy forces in the valley. The tribesmen, he thought, were moving along the crests in small groups—ten men here, twenty men there.

Colonel Descourt refused to be alarmed. According to the information he had received that morning from general headquarters, Abd el Krim's main thrust was expected down the Ouerga Valley. The attack was not anticipated for another two weeks, for the mountain trails were still kneedeep in mud.

"Probably a foraging expedition," he decided. "They're short of food up there, the rascals."

And he spent the next ten minutes, with the aid of beautifully made ordnance maps, convincing his chief-of-staff that an attack down the Bou Amara Pass would be a strategic blunder unworthy of a clever fellow like Abd el Krim. He was fresh from the war college and what he did not know about higher strategy was not worth knowing.

"Yes," agreed the chief-of-staff, scratching his ear. "Of course. But—"

"Fez," said the colonel, "is ninety kilometers from the Ouerga. The railroad, which is our jugular vein, runs within twenty kilometers of the Ouerga. Krim must cut the railroad to insure the success of his attack upon Fez—"

"Of course," agreed the chief-of-staff. "But—"

"It would be folly for him to make a flank attack at this stage of the game!"

He was still talking, when a far off sound like the popping of champagne corks echoed down the valley.

He jumped to his feet and hurried out of doors. A haze of smoke eddied along

the crest of the hill overlooking the camp. An observation post had been established up there at Colonel Descourt's order.

"Ah-ha," said the chief-of-staff, peering through his binoculars, "now I see them!"

The colonel borrowed the glasses. At first he saw nothing but rocks and boulders shimmering in the heat. Then he spied a small gray figure running along the skyline. One, two, a dozen of them—closing in around the observation post.

"The audacity of those brigands!" he sputtered. "The sheer audacity of them!"

He was not only an armchair strategist; he was also a man of action.

He issued orders: All troops to stand by; two companies of Senegalese Tirailleurs to clear the enemy off the ridge; another company to scale the opposite ridge; Captain Lelong's Legionnaires to establish a barrier across the valley.

But events moved even faster than he could give orders.

While the bugles were braying the alarm, word was brought in by a transport driver that he had been shot at while watering his mules two miles below the camp.

Lelong brought in his Legionnaires on the double, leaving the picks and shovels behind. He reported three killed and five wounded. The opposite bank of the ford swarmed with hillmen.

"How many?" inquired Descourt. "At a rough guess—"

Lelong did not know. He didn't give a damn. His gray beard bristled as he listened to the colonel who was vociferously telling the world that he was going to teach the Riffi a lesson they would never forget.

Meanwhile the enemy had been definitely located in front, on the flanks and in rear.

The camp was in an uproar. Troops marking time, troops falling in, bugles blowing, orderlies running in all directions, sutlers tearing out their hair and demanding protection.

The faraway popping as of champagne corks had given way to the clear, sharp crack of rifles—many rifles on the hillsides and in the valley.

The two companies of Senegalese detailed to recapture the observation post got under way. Red fezzes bobbed, bayonets gleamed in the sunlight. White officer ahead, white sergeants behind. A comforting spectacle, thought the colonel. Discipline and orderliness opposed to tribal barbarism. The line swept across the plain and up the slope—and a machine gun manned by barbarous tribesmen sprayed it with lead and blasted it to hell.

Descourt saw his brave Senegalese go down in line of platoons, and he grew sick from watching. An officer and a handful of men, squirming on their bellies from cover to cover, finally reached the gun and put it out of action. But the two companies had ceased to exist as units.

And every second the menace grew and spread until the camp was ringed with fire.

IN QUICK succession three slugs tore through the roof of the infirmary. Blaisot stared dubiously at the holes.

"One more," he said to himself, "and, orders or no orders, me, I shall get up."

He had been in hospital almost two full weeks. Most of his aches and pains were gone, and his features were beginning to look human again, but his right side, over his broken ribs, was still tightly taped and bandaged.

Outside the tent people were running about and yelling, and each second the noise increased, until all the crashings and bangings blended into an unceasing roar. He could not tell what was happening. The orderly had disappeared as soon as the commotion began, and the other patients were too sick to care what happened. One man, suffering from blood poisoning, was holding a long conversation with an invisible girl by the

name of Emilienne. On the opposite side of the ward, an Arab Cavalryman lay like a log, stolid and motionless, watching a fly crawl up the canvas wall.

Snick! A foot or so above Blaisot's head another hole appeared. The bullet streaked across the ward and struck a glass jar full of lint bandages. The jar burst, showering bits of glass all over the place.

"That settles it," decided Blaisot. "I'm not going to be killed in here."

As the words flashed through his mind, a hail of bullets struck the tent. The Cavalryman sat bolt upright, yelled something that sounded like *"Hoo! Yarrouldi!"* and fell over backward, spouting blood through his wideopen mouth. One of the tent poles collapsed, burying him beneath a billowing mound of canvas.

Blaisot crawled out into the open on hands and knees. On the threshold he met the medical orderly who shouted at him:

"Have you seen my haversack? I left my purse and all my papers in my haversack."

He started to tell a complicated story about a ration allowance of forty-three francs and seventy-five centimes which the government owed him. But Blaisot cut him short.

"What's happening?" he demanded.

The orderly flapped his arm about.

"Can't you hear? We're being attacked. They've captured the forage park—forage park—captured the forage park. The surgeon-major indorsed my claim, but if I lose those papers—They'll be here in a minute. The Senegalese are shot to pieces. I left the haversack hanging on a nail."

More bullets. The clatter of machine guns. A group of Spahis raced by in a cloud of dust, their cloaks bellying in the wind.

"Where's the Legion?" insisted Blaisot. "Where have they gone?"

"The Legion?" cried the orderly. "I don't know. Haven't seen 'em. If I don't find those papers I'll have to make out a fresh claim, because—"

A great howling sound filled the air. It grew louder and louder. Rooted to the ground, Blaisot gaped at the pale blue sky. Twenty yards away a fountain of earth, smoke and flying mud leaped upward.

The medical orderly spun around crazily and collapsed.

All the rules of colonial warfare were shattered by that explosion. Illiterate tribesmen were shelling a French camp with high explosives. There was something very wrong with that picture.

Blaisot started to run. Then he realized that he had left his clothes, boots and rifle in the infirmary. In fact, he wore nothing but a singlet and a pair of cotton underpants which flapped around his ankles. He crept back into the tent and retrieved his kit. The septic poisoning case was still telling Emilienne what he thought of her.

Another shell burst nearby while Blaisot was trying to fasten his shoelaces: an awkward business because of the bandages around his ribs. The blast of the explosion threw him flat on his face. It made him so mad that he forgot the acute pain in his lungs. He slammed a handful of cartridges into his rifle and went out to look for trouble. He found plenty.

As he left the infirmary, he was surprised to discover two tribesmen bending over the medical orderly. They were ransacking the dead man's pockets.

Blaisot dropped them both with the same bullet. He wondered, even as he squeezed the trigger, how they had worked their way into the camp. The valley was full of dust and dense clouds of smoke. The supply depot was blazing furiously. Embers and sparks, scattered by the bursting shells, set whole rows of tents on fire.

The air was alive with the shrill flight of bullets. The slugs seemed to be missing him by a hair's breadth. Blaisot glared angrily about, but there was not a soul in sight. He was stranded in the midst of a chaotic turmoil.

SUDDENLY he spotted a small knot of dismounted Spahis running along, stoop shouldered, behind a row of tents. He limped toward them.

"Hey, you! The Beni Couscous—" he called out. "Where's the Legion?"

Six pairs of bloodshot eyes stared at him. They saw the stripes on his sleeve; broad bands of bright green worsted. He was not only a white man, but a noncommissioned officer.

"Legion," explained a graybearded Mohammedan, "gone. All gone. You lead us. They are coming."

"Who's coming?" inquired Blaisot. "Sacred name of a little pig, what's the matter? Has everybody gone crazy?"

"There," said the native. "Look."

A score of hillsmen, their *djellaba* flapping around their bare shanks, were closing in upon them. They were so fierce and yelled so loudly that for a moment he was tempted to turn tail and run. But he could not run away from a bunch of damned savages.

For the first time in his life he issued orders:

"Form line! Open sights, take aim! Five rounds rapid! Fire!"

It worked like a charm. The Spahis did exactly as they were told. The surviving hillsmen dodged back into the swirling fog of dust and smoke.

"*Ça barde!*" Blaisot cried joyously. "Follow me!"

With his squad at his heels, he ducked and dodged in among the burning tents, lying in wait for his foes, smashing them at pointblank range, shifting quickly from one position to another whenever the hillsmen threatened to swamp his small force. Instinctively, he did the right thing, fighting with all the cold blooded, murderous fury of his breed, tracking down loot burdened barbarians as he had once tracked bourgeois through the streets of Paris.

His example was contagious. The Spahis sloughed off the lessons hammered into them by their drill sergeants and reverted to type. Guerrilla warfare came to them naturally. They followed Blaisot as a pack follows its leader, hitting, running, hitting again—drifting away through the smoke before they could be pinned down and surrounded.

Near the wagon park, behind a rampart of barbed wire and overturned timbers, he rounded up a platoon of Senegalese Tirailleurs. They were demoralized and ready to crack up, for their sergeant had been shot through the stomach and was about to die. He and his men were, he explained, all that was left of the rear guard. Colonel Descourt was retreating down the valley toward Ain Kouffra.

"What about the Legion?" asked Blaisot.

"Gone back," hiccoughed the sergeant. "Personal bodyguard for Descourt. He couldn't get out fast enough." His breath rattled in his throat. "Your captain'll be court-martialed if he's not careful . . . I heard him cursing—he wanted to save the supply depot—"

Blaisot tried to act as though the supply depot were of immense importance.

"Of course it ought to have been saved," he asserted, glancing at the blazing pyre. "Never heard of such a thing—running away like this! It's a disgrace. What do we do now?"

"Do?" echoed the sergeant. "Nothing. We're surrounded. Can't get out —I've tried—" The words bubbled up one by one out of his blood clogged throat. "We—stayed—too—long. Too—"

An unseeing stare crept into his eyes. A moment later his lower jaw sagged open.

"Surrounded, are we?" snorted Blaisot. "*Je m'en fiche!* They're not going to get me.

"Who wants to go home?" he yelled at the Senegalese. "All of you? Fine! Let's get going."

They didn't understand a word he said, but his fiery enthusiasm was more eloquent than words. Instead of waiting for annihilation behind flimsy de-

fenses, instead of seeing their dead pile up around them, instead of blazing away through the gray twilight at dimly seen hillmen, Blaisot led them out into the open. He made them lay aside their rifles and draw their machetes—long bladed, short handled weapons which, at close quarters, can snick off a head as a knife slides through butter.

Thirty-two machetes, six carbines and Blaisot's bayonet to lead the way. Shoulder to shoulder they hurled themselves upon the enemy ranks and the Riffi scattered before this living battering ram. As far as they were concerned, the fighting was over and they were most heartily glad to be rid of that hornets' nest, at any price. They had overrun the camp; plunder, not bloodshed, was uppermost in their minds. Chieftains who ought to have been leading their clans into action were busily supervising the loading of their horses with everything they could lay hands upon. Nothing was too trivial or too bulky for them to take—from bags of flour to cholera belts, from horseshoes to toothpicks.

In that mad scramble it was every man for himself—and Blaisot, as soon as he reached the outskirts of the encampment, met with little opposition. He lost nine men, but he evened the score by capturing five times as many hillmen whom he found out in the open stripping the clothes off dead French soldiers.

"We'll do this thing in style!" he told his sweating, blood smeared crew. "We're civilized—positively. We don't kill our prisoners. We put 'em in prison and let 'em die of consumption. By your right—forward!"

It was late afternoon when he reached Ain Kouffra. His arrival did not pass unnoticed.

First he was halted by an outpost two kilometers up the road. The young officer in charge of the post bombarded him with questions. Who was he and why? Where had he been? The questions exasperated Blaisot. He was footsore and weary and his ribs were extremely painful. He wanted to take off his boots and lie down. But he was not permitted to lie down.

The officer patted him on the back and assured him that he was a fine fellow.

"Could I have a drink?" croaked Blaisot. "We haven't had a drop since morning."

He was given a drink of lukewarm water out of a sergeant's canteen. Then the officer rode beside him all the way to camp. Captain Lelong and a whole flock of officers buzzed around him and his men and his prisoners. More questions. He answered them as best he could. There was not much to tell. He had done what any other man would have done under like circumstances—saved his skin.

"Wait," snapped Lelong. "This is important. It bears out exactly what I have been saying . . ."

Blaisot waited. There was nothing else for him to do. Nobody seemed to realize how much his feet hurt. As a matter of fact, they hurt like hell. But he couldn't mention such matters to his commanding officer.

After awhile, Lelong came back and marched him into a hut where another squad of officers confronted him. One of them was a divisional general with three stars on his cuff. Beside the general, white as a sheet, sat Colonel Descourt.

"This is Corporal Blaisot," said Lelong.

The general nodded.

"Tell me your story in your own way, Corporal."

Blaisot was sick and tired of the story. But he told it all over again.

"In other words," said the general, turning to his officers, "the man left a sickbed to fight a brilliant rear guard action."

"Which bears out my contention," added Captain Lelong, "that our retreat was a disastrous mistake. Had we counter-attacked at once—"

"Quite so," agreed the general with a sidelong glance at Descourt's twitching face, "but that's a matter which we need not discuss at present. I think the corporal is deserving of the highest praise. His behavior has been altogether admirable."

He arose and shook hands with the bemused corporal.

"Men of your stamp are scarce," he declared heartily. "I want to thank you for the splendid work you have done today. It will not be forgotten."

It was not forgotten.

In divisional orders the next morning two items appeared side by side:

> Colonel Descourt is relieved of his command and placed at the disposal of the resident-general.
>
> Corporal Blaisot, Jules, left the hospital at Bou Amara while the action was at its height and, by his courage and daring initiative, inspired a decimated rear guard to fight its way out of the enemy's lines. For these services Corporal Jules Blaisot is hereby promoted to the rank of sergeant and proposed to the ministry of war for the Military Medal.

BY THE light of a pair of candles glued to the tabletop Sergeant Blaisot was reading a book. His gaze was literally riveted on the printed page. The effort was so painful that his face was screwed up into a tight knot. He underscored each line with a slowly moving forefinger and, when the time came to turn a page, he wetted the ball of his thumb on his tongue.

From the sergeants' mess across the way came the sound of voices and the clink of glasses. But Blaisot, though the divisional general had pinned the Military Medal upon his chest that very morning, sat alone in his hut and wrestled with words of three syllables.

The book was entitled, "The Duties of a Sergeant of the French Foreign Legion".

Another large volume with a red binding lay on the table in front of the candles. It was called "The Revised Military Code".

The duties of a sergeant, he was discovering, were numerous and complex. He was appalled at their number and complexity. He felt he could never learn all the things he was supposed to know. Yet the adjutant had said to him:

"Don't think you know it all just because the divisional kissed you on both cheeks. If you can handle a platoon, you'll be all right. If not . . ." He glanced meaningly at Blaisot's stripes and left the sentence unfinished. "Personally, I'd like to see you pull through. You are young—you can go a long way. Come to me if anything bothers you, and don't drink yourself silly. Leave that to the older men. *You* want to watch your step."

Blaisot was watching his step with a vengeance. He did not feel at all comfortable in the mess among the demigods, and after celebrating his promotion with a couple of bottles of white wine, he had returned to his room to acquire a little knowledge.

It did not take him long to find out that he knew exactly nothing.

"A sergeant," said the book, "is responsible for the training, the discipline and the morale of his men.

"A platoon is the living expression of a sergeant's ability to deal with men of many types. A sergeant must never be on terms of familiarity with his men.

"A sergeant must be able to read a compass; he must be able to make rough, but accurate, sketch maps."

There were chapters on the penetrating power of bullets, on the care of the feet, on topography, on diet.

Blaisot had not opened a book since he had obtained his "Certificate of Primary Studies" at the age of ten. His reading to date consisted of murder trial reports and sports news.

It alarmed him to find that he could read through several paragraphs of "The Duties of a Sergeant" without understanding or remembering a single, solitary word. His mind kept wandering away. He saw himself shooting the two

Arabs outside the infirmary at Bou Amara. Then he recalled the look on Colonel Descourt's face. And after that he found himself wondering what had become of a girl he had known in Ménilmontant. Yet he wanted to learn. He was sweating blood and getting a splitting headache trying to learn. He was on fire with ambition. Six months in the Legion and a sergeant! There was no telling where he might end.

Clutching his head between his fists he read:

> "A projectile does not reach its maximum penetrating powers until it has traveled, in the case of the Model D bullet, at least two hundred meters. The rifling in the barrel of the gun imparts to the projectile a rotary motion or twist which—"

Just then he remembered his medal, the medal the general had pinned on his tunic that morning. His eyes strayed across the room to the tunic hanging on two pegs. He wondered whether the clasp were securely fastened. He could not read another line until he found out. He got up and examined the clasp. It was doing its duty nobly—the best clasp and the most perfect medal ever made under government contract.

He was about to retrace his steps when some one lurched heavily against the door.

His first thought was that one of his fellow-sergeants was dropping in for a chat. Beaming from ear to ear, like a bride about to receive her first guest at her first party, he yanked the door open.

On the threshold stood Legionnaire Henri Fourment and Legionnaire William Tennant. They were very full of wine. Tennant saluted with both hands simultaneously.

"Greetings, great conqueror!" he hiccoughed. "Alexander the Macedonian had nothing on you. Have you ever heard of the Retreat of the Ten Thousand? Homer put it to music. 'With cannons upon their right and cannons upon their left, backward they charged.'" He smacked his lips. "Beautiful, isn't it?"

He steadied himself on Fourment's shoulder.

"That's settled," he went on in a more normal voice. "You have seen him, now come away."

"*Sergeant* Blaisot!" jeered Fourment. "Why, you dirty, doublecrossing louse, I wouldn't take orders from you if you were a major-general. That's what I wanted to say to you, and a lot more, too!"

Blaisot swallowed hard, struggling within himself to control his temper and to retain his dignity.

His voice was calm, almost gentle.

"If you'll take my advice," he pointed out, "you'll go to bed."

"Forgive us!" begged Tennant. "We're just a pair of boyish hero worshipers. I wish I had an autograph album for you to sign! And I want you to know that I'll never forget the wonderful times we have had together."

"Listen here," Blaisot cut in. "We'll start with a clean slate. Forget what happened at Bou Amara. That's over and done with. I did what I thought was right. I am not sorry. Discipline—"

"Let us pray!"

"I could have had you court-martialed, but I kept my mouth shut," snapped Blaisot. "I'm willing to mind my own business if you mind yours. I've no grudge against you. There isn't one chance in fifty you'll be in my platoon. If you are, I'll treat you just like anybody else. Now get out of here and behave properly."

Tennant sprang to attention, bringing his heels together so violently that he almost knocked himself over.

"Yes, *mon Sergent,*" he agreed. "At once, *mon Sergent.* Nothing, I assure you, was further from my thoughts than to trespass upon your privacy. I came to keep an eye on friend Henri, who persists in making threats of the most alarming."

EVEN in a uniform, friend Henri had all the earmarks of the Paris apache. The vizor of his cap was bent in two and dragged down over his ferret-like face. A cigaret stub adhered to his lower lip. Round shouldered, hollow chested, he leaned against the doorjamb, with his hands thrust deep in his trouser pockets.

He reminded Blaisot of a hundred sights and sounds he was trying to forget.

"I can take care of myself," he assured Tennant. "Go to bed and sober up, the pair of you." He tried to speak with the abrupt authority of a veteran. "On your way! I'm busy."

"That suits me," agreed Tennant. He nudged Fourment in the ribs. "Come on, Sanguinary Terror of the Dark, we've had our say. Leave the sergeant to his meditations."

But Fourment refused to budge.

"Trying to give me orders!" he drawled. "Listen to him. And not so long ago he was picking hemp at the Maison Centrale at Melun. Certainly he was. Picking hemp."

"I'm off," declared Tennant. "Better come along, Henri, before it is too late. I'm warning you."

"We're going to settle this business tonight," swore Fourment. "Him or me—the damn swine! A fine army this is when they give medals to assassins. I'm one too, but I'm not ashamed of it. He is. And, sacred name of God, I'm the man who knows what to do to stool-pigeons!"

"Goodnight," Tennant called out over his shoulder. "This is getting too personal for me. To bed! To bed!"

"You too, Fourment," Blaisot ordered in an unsteady voice. "Better be on your way."

Fourment came into the room and shut the door.

"I'd be out of the Legion if you hadn't interfered. I'd be a free man with a pocketful of money. Because of you I'm still wearing this livery. *Eh bien,* I'm through. Finished! You don't think I'd take orders from a two faced cow like you, do you? I'll lick nobody's boots, not even yours. Get your knife. We're going to fight it out."

Blaisot made one last, desperate effort to assert his authority.

"I won't argue with you," he declared. "Out you go at once, or I'll have you put in the guardroom."

Fourment laughed at him, a low chuckle utterly devoid of mirth. From his pocket he drew a bone handled knife. He snapped the blade open with a flick of the wrist.

"I'll give you ten seconds. If you won't fight, I'll bleed you like a pig in a slaughterhouse." And he began to count, "One—two—three—"

Blaisot dodged across the room and to the shelf where his clothes were stacked. He swept them aside. His knife lay under his shirts.

The moment his fingers closed around the smooth surface of its handle, it was as though he had never left the dismal streets of Ménilmontant. He was not a sergeant dealing with an unruly subordinate; he was an apache, face to face with another apache, killers both of them.

"Ten!" said Fourment.

Poised on their toes, bodies bending slightly forward, they circled around each other with the smooth, easy grace of ballet dancers. The blades flashed in the candlelight. Over in the sergeants' mess somebody was singing "La Main de ma Sœur", to the thump-thump-thump of empty mugs. The warm night air smelled of hay and horse dung and wood smoke.

Fourment struck first, as a cat strikes, at lightning speed. Feint at the throat—feint again—a slight shifting of the feet. Strike!

Miss! Missed by a hair's breadth as Blaisot tucked in his stomach just out of reach of the razor-sharp point. And at the same instant came the counter-thrust aimed at Fourment's heart. He gave his shoulders an almost imperceptible

tible twist. Rip! The knife sliced a three-inch slit in the left breastpocket of Fourment's tunic.

Then once more they were circling around the room, moving in perfect unison like partners performing some intricate ritual dance. Because there was no apparent violence in the flow and rhythm of their gestures, they seemed to move effortlessly—but before long their creased faces were streaked with sweat and the air whistled sharply through their teeth.

Slash—parry—slash! The dull thud of bone meeting bone. Slash! Fourment jerked his head away, cheekbone laid open. First blood—streaming down the left side of his face, dripping on his chin.

For one split second Blaisot's glance strayed to the red splotches on the front of Fourment's tunic. And as his attention wavered, Fourment pounced.

Blaisot swerved away, but not quite fast enough. A dark stain appeared on the front of his shirt, a long streak which crept down to his belt.

"That'll make a nice buttonhole," said Fourment, his lips stiff and white. "Get your baboon of a divisional general to pin a medal on that!"

Blaisot drew a deep breath. Nothing wrong with his lungs. There was no pain. It was only a flesh wound—a scratch.

The slow dance went on, and their shadows, monstrously distorted by the candlelight, writhed across the walls, keeping them company as they weaved in and out, hunting for an opening—for the opening clear through to the other man's heart. The pallid glow of the candles exaggerated the chalky whiteness of their faces and made the blood streaming down Fourment's cheek look as black and shiny as tar.

All at once Blaisot, shifting sidewise, brushed against the edge of the table. The candles toppled over. One went out. The other, shedding a pinpoint of murky light, rolled across the table until it came to rest against "The Duties of a Sergeant". A page turned brown, curled up, burst into flame. And, as it blazed, Fourment sprang forward, raising his knife high above his head, aiming at Blaisot's neck where it joined the shoulder.

The uncertain light spoiled his aim. They crashed together, chest to chest, each digging the fingers of his left hand into the other man's right wrist. Their muscles cracked beneath the strain. Fourment was slightly heavier, more powerfully built. He leaned against Blaisot, forcing him over the edge of the table. There was no support for Blaisot's back. He felt the heat of the blazing book scorching his neck. The stench of singed hair filled the room. His wet fingers began to slip on Fourment's wrist. The point of the knife was within inches of his throat.

"SACRED name of a thousand thunders!" he heard some one shout. "What passes itself in here? Is it that the entire cantonment is to be destroyed by fire?"

A shadow loomed up behind Fourment—the large and substantial shadow of Adjutant Ludwig Glücker, senior noncommissioned officer at Ain Kouffra. He was not the sort of man who needed a knife. Divine Providence and natural selection, working through the medium of hardy Saxon peasants, had endowed him with fists reminiscent of Westphalian hams.

Fourment never knew what hit him. As a matter of fact, one of those fists landed on his fontanelle. The blow would have felled a rhinoceros in the full pride of its strength. It felled Fourment. He hit the ground so hard that he bounced.

Adjutant Glücker, who was fully aware of the anesthetic properties of his fists, did not give him a second look. He yanked Blaisot away from the table and tossed him on to the cot. Then he put out the fire by shoving the book on the floor and stamping on it. He

set up the candles and lighted them before he condescended to speak.

Finally he said:

"Yes. I come in here to see you, because I think, 'He is new and wants to learn. I shall give him a few pointers maybe.' And this is what I find! A sergeant fighting with knives with a private. It is a disgrace to the uniform you wear." He bent down and picked up the charred remains of the book. Indignant bellows burst from his lips. "The book I let you have! I loaned you this to study out of, and you make a bonfire with it!"

Blaisot tried to stand up.

"Sit down!" boomed Glücker. "Sit! Look at you smoldering as if you had just come out of the innermost pit of hell. Even your hair catches fire!" He stood in front of Blaisot, towering above him. "Who is this man?" he demanded. "Why did he attack you?"

"I knew him in the old days," gulped Blaisot, "when I was a civilian. We enlisted together."

Glücker nodded. He was already in possession of the salient points of the new sergeant's career, for he had read Captain Lelong's confidential report dealing with the arrest of the agitator at Bou Amara, and the thrashing Blaisot had suffered at the hands of parties unknown.

"A friend, eh?" he commented. "Bad business, friends, when you are not traveling the same road. They hold you back. You can not shield bad-heads like this Fourment."

"Shield him—" protested Blaisot.

"*Suffit!* You know what I am talking about. You are going up—he is going down. Stand by him and he will drag you down with him. That is how they thank you, these apaches."

Blaisot squirmed uneasily. He did not like to hear one of his former friends referred to as an apache. The implication was that he himself was an apache also, a fact which he badly wanted to forget.

Glücker read his thoughts.

"Some of us—most of us—have made mistakes," he declared. "That is nothing. Today you are a sergeant. The past can take care of itself. Nobody will find out more than you care to tell." He leaned over and peered at Blaisot's bloodsoaked shirt. "How badly are you hurt?"

"Nothing much. Skin torn, that's all."

"Good. A strip of courtplaster will hide it. Tomorrow night the Freydenburg column leaves. You are going with it. Not a man, not an officer, will know you. You need experience, but that will come as you go along."

"And him?" inquired Blaisot, pointing toward Fourment, who was groaning most dismally.

" 'For having struck a superior officer, five to ten years at hard labor,' " quoted the adjutant. "He is out of your way. Let him go. Now," he said abruptly, "give me your knife."

Blaisot was slow to understand the order. He gaped at the adjutant.

"Knife!" Glücker barked. "Imbecile, obey when I tell you to do something."

"It is there on the floor, by the table."

"Fetch it! Hand it to me."

Blaisot did as he was told.

Very deliberately, Glücker placed the blade beneath his heel and broke it in two.

"A sergeant," he explained, "does not carry such a knife. You see what I mean? That is over. If ever a man attacks you," he spoke with magnificent contempt, "send him to the guardroom. That is lesson number one for you to learn. *Bon!* We call the picket and have this Fourment locked up. Then come over to my room. We have a drink and I give you some pointers."

Blaisot did not know whether to laugh or cry. He did neither, because he was a Legionnaire and a sergeant. He drew himself up to attention.

"Thank you, *Monsieur l'Adjudant.* I'll be over at once."

And Fourment, lying on his back, watching the scene out of malevolent, bloodshot eyes, croaked:

"Kiss him, *salopard*. Get down on your knees and lick his boots!"

FROM the beginning of the Riff campaign, Blaisot served with the Freydenburg flying column—the pick of the French army in Africa. It was sent into the hills to harass and disorganize the rebel forces, while the bulk of the troops crawled slowly up the valleys, making ready for the great battle that never came.

Blaisot sweated blood. He marched and fought. Marched again. Went hungry and thirsty. He never knew a day's rest, nor a minute's peace. When his shoes gave out, he wrapped his feet in rags and went on—with an oleander bloom stuck in the muzzle of his rifle—pounding out the miles.

It was a dog's life, a life of privation, misery and suffering, but no greater stroke of good luck could have befallen him. He left Ain Kouffra with a sergeant's stripes still fresh on his sleeve: one under-officer among many, an unimportant cog in a complex fighting machine. His medals meant nothing to the hardbitten veterans of the Freydenburg column. They had medals of their own in plenty.

Blaisot had to measure up to their exacting standards or go under. He stood the test, learning his lesson as he went along, patterning his behavior after that of his fellow-sergeants and his officers. Bubbling over with enthusiasm, tireless, cool headed, he did all that was expected of him, and more. Fate dragged him out of the ruck, boosted him on his way.

Seven separate times he was mentioned in dispatches before Abd el Krim surrendered. He became a leader of men, this thin faced, hard mouthed gutter rat. It was Sergeant Blaisot who took command of the company at Ras-Fullah, after the last officer went down, and outflanked the rebels before they had a chance to drive home their surprise attack. Blaisot, again, who led the charge during the fighting on Hill 362; Blaisot, who maneuvered his men out of the ambush at the shrine of Sidi ben Snasser.

No one ever suspected him of having been bred in a Ménilmontant tenement. His personality and his mannerisms changed with astonishing swiftness. He acquired knowledge as a dry sponge soaks up water. He learned something from every officer with whom he came in contact. His speech lost the drawling inflections of the *faubourg;* he used less and less slang, until at last he spoke with the curt precision of a St. Cyr graduate. He mastered the rudiments of politeness, the ability to control his temper. One by one, he acquired the characteristics of the class he had been taught to despise: the much hated bourgeois whose very name is a term of contempt in the Paris slums.

The change was conscious and deliberate. Never for a moment could he afford to relax. The ghost of Jules the apache was forever at his elbow, waiting for an opportunity to trip him up. But he laid that ghost.

Before the end of the campaign, several rumors were current as to the real identity of the brilliant young sergeant. According to one version he was the son of a Roubaix cloth manufacturer and was supposed to have thrown away a fortune on the gambling tables of Monte Carlo before joining the Legion. It was a good story. Junior subalterns, dreaming of home and (no doubt) of mother as they marched up the rock ribbed gorges of the Riff, envied Blaisot's glamorous, though illusory, past. When, thirsting for details, they endeavored to pump him, he merely smiled and shook his head. He neither affirmed nor denied, and his reticence made him doubly popular.

"You'll go a long way," his company commander prophesied. "There is nothing to stop you from going as far as you like."

"I am afraid I do not quite understand, *mon Capitaine,*" said Blaisot, who

understood perfectly well.

"St. Maixent," explained the captain. "Not quite yet, maybe. One of these days, certainly."

St. Maixent is the officers' training school for promising men who have served in the ranks.

It was far more than Blaisot had ever bargained for, but he did not lose his head. The Riff war had petered out. His battalion was resting at Marakesh. He had plenty of time to spare, and instead of wasting his leisure hours in the mess, he studied.

He read everything he could lay hands on—newspapers and textbooks and novels; the Crimean war and Anatole France, Foch's "Principles of Modern Warfare", and Zola. The days were too short for all he had to do. The months sped by at breathtaking speed.

Then came the Taza expedition, and again he was humping a pack up hill and down dale with the dust caked on his sweating face, and the sun boring into his skull. Honors and praise had not made him soft nor robbed him of his courage. When his company, attacked by overwhelming odds, was surrounded in the Embareck Pass, he worked his way through the enemy lines and traveled twenty kilometers to summon reenforcements. He covered the last few miles on hands and knees, for he was riddled with bullets and leaking like a sieve.

Because the surgeons swore he was bound to die, a staff colonel visited him in hospital and pinned the Legion of Honor beside his Military Medal.

But he did not die. Before long he was sitting up in bed reading Michelet's "History of the French Revolution". He had reached the chapter dealing with the downfall of the Girondins, when the Sister of Mercy, who had charge of the ward, bustled up to his bedside with a paper in her hand. Her face was placid, but her eyes glittered with suppressed excitement.

"My child," she inquired, "can you stand a shock?"

"If you want to change the drainage tubes in my leg," he retorted, "I can't stand it. Once a day is plenty."

She laughed happily.

"Listen. It is here in today's garrison orders: 'Sergeant Blaisot, Jules, holder of the Legion of Honor and the Military Medal: in view of the gallant services rendered by this noncommissioned officer during the Riff and Taza campaigns, the minister of war has decreed that he be detached from the First Regiment of the Foreign Legion and transferred to the Officers' Training School at St. Maixent.' Lieutenant—" a quaver crept into her voice —"I have the honor of saluting you!"

He could not speak, for there was a lump in his throat and, for want of something better to do, he blubbered like a two-year-old.

The words of his company commander flashed through his mind—

"There is nothing to stop you from going as far as you like."

He was well on his way.

AS SOON as he was able to hobble about, he sailed for France. Panic seized him when the steamer reached Marseilles and he saw a flock of policemen on the quay. His knees shook so violently as he went down the gangplank that he could hardly stand up. All the *flics* were looking straight at him. Of course, the Paris bureau had broadcast his photograph and fingerprints. Two gendarmes marched up to him as he tottered ashore—but they were not scrutinizing his face; they were admiring his medals.

"Permit us to assist you, *mon Sergent,*" one of them said deferentially. "You look tired—a bad crossing, no doubt. Lean upon us, *mon Sergent.* A taxi to the station? But certainly! At once! Taxi! This way, taxi! Name of God, will you hurry? Can't you see the sergeant is wounded?"

They did not even ask to see his traveling permit.

But he did not feel at home in France. Old memories assailed him at every turn. He was tormented by the dread that at the very next street corner a hand would drop on his shoulder and a voice would say:

"Verron, you're wanted. Better come quietly."

For the next two years he stayed close to the barracks at St. Maixent. He studied with such unflagging energy that his teachers, when they found that he appeared to love work for its own sake, crammed him with French thoroughness. They did not attempt to make a gentleman out of him, for St. Maixent is a technical school solely interested in the professional skill of its graduates. Their table manners and their cultural background are their own concern. They must learn as they go. If they can't learn, so much the worse for them when they come in contact with their social superiors trained at St. Cyr, the French West Point.

At the final examinations, Jules Blaisot took second place out of a class of ninety-six.

"This," declared the school commandant, "is an excellent beginning. You are a man of great promise. I say this not to flatter you, but because it is the truth. The staff college, Lieutenant, ought to be your next goal. Why not apply for a transfer to a French line regiment? You would be near to the libraries—"

Blaisot, however, was through with libraries. He wanted to get away from city streets and plainclothesmen and the damnable uncertainty of it all. He could not leave fast enough.

"I am a Legionnaire," he told the commandant. "That is my life. My place is out there, in Morocco. I can work in my spare time."

So he went back to the regimental depot at Sidi bel Abbes with a trunkful of brand new uniforms and a mind replete with brand new ideas. Outwardly there was no trace left of the Ménilmontant apache. He held himself erect and he walked with a quick, brisk stride. He was twenty-five, but he looked a good deal older. His face had filled out and his eyes had lost their uneasy wariness.

Secret and confidential reports followed him. The school commandant wrote in glowing terms about this star pupil of his, but the powers that be are not easily moved to enthusism. They turned a coldly appraising eye upon this Lieutenant Jules Blaisot.

"We know," they said in substance, "that he is brave. We know also that he has shown himself to be a painstaking scholar (although, *nota bene*, his knowledge of logarithms is below par). But exactly who *is* this young man? What was his early environment? Is he trustworthy? His record is very fine, but, if and when we place responsibility upon his shoulders, will he bear the burden or crack beneath the strain?"

These questions had to go unanswered. Blaisot's past, because he was a Legionnaire, was nobody's business but his own. Officially, he had come into the world full grown the day he had enlisted. Discreet inquiries made by a staff captain led nowhere. Blaisot refused to commit himself.

"Very well," concluded the powers that be. "We are in honor bound to respect the lieutenant's silence, but we can not afford to run any risks. He has traveled far and fast. Now let him mark time for awhile; let him be tried and tested so that we may find out beyond a shadow of a doubt whether he is flawless."

And they sent Lieutenant Blaisot to the oasis of Kairoum in the heart of the Iguidi Desert; and they dropped him there and forgot him.

AT FIRST Blaisot was pleased and flattered by the appointment: flattered because he had been selected for the job almost as soon as he reached Africa, although several officers were ahead of him on the roster; pleased be-

cause it was his first independent command.

"You will find conditions out there rather peculiar," the major in charge of personnel warned him. "It is rather a lonely spot. Gun smugglers used to stop at Kairoum on their way northward. Nowadays, of course, they have chosen another route. You won't have much to do." He hesitated and looked down at his hands. "I am told the Beni Saffra pass through the oasis twice a year when they change pasture lands, but that's about all. In fact, it's mostly routine work at Kairoum—training and discipline, that sort of thing. You may find it somewhat dull."

Blaisot tried to thank the major, but the latter cut him short.

"Do you know anything about the desert?" he inquired.

"Not a single thing." Blaisot smiled. "I've done all my campaigning in Morocco." He coughed a little before he added with airy unconcern, "I know that part of the world like a book, and I expected to rejoin my old battalion at Marakesh, but I'll be just as glad to see something of the desert. It will be a—er—new experience."

His cap was just a shade too small for his head in those days, and he was full of illusions as to his own importance. The scales dropped from his eyes, however, after a few weeks at Kairoum.

It lay at the back of beyond, in the middle of a flat and stony plain which stretched away like a gray sea toward heat blurred horizons. The oasis itself was an abomination of desolation: a clump of ragged palm trees, a thread of water seeping out of the earth at the foot of a ledge of red rock and vanishing into the sand a few yards farther on—and nothing else. Not a blade of grass, not a bush—nothing but the murderous sun and the everlasting wind, hot as the blast from an oven door.

The redoubt—four mud huts surrounded by a mud wall—stood on a hillock about two hundred yards from the spring. Cooped up inside the blockhouse were sixty Legionnaires, the dirtiest, laziest set of scoundrels Blaisot had come across since he had been in the army. It did not take him long to find out that they were sullen and intractable. They drilled like sheep, they saluted when it suited their convenience, and their sleeping quarters were worse than pigsties.

Blaisot blew up. He thought he understood exactly why he had been sent to Kairoum: to clean up the mess made by his predecessor, to drill some decency and self-respect into the troopers' heads. *Bon dieu!* He was the right man in the right place. He was sure of it.

Metaphorically speaking, he spat on his hands and went to work, and he accomplished exactly nothing. He could not break down the passive resistance of his men. Extra drills, fines, lectures had no effect upon them.

"They're impossible," he fumed, glaring at his second-in-command, a squat, thickset sergeant by the name of Fleischman. "Half of them ought to be shot, the other half ought to be in prison."

"That is just the point," said Fleischman, pulling a long face. "A good many of them have been in prison. You want to be careful how you handle these men, Lieutenant. You don't want to push them too far."

Blaisot drew himself up to his full five-foot-nine and stared down his nose at the sergeant.

"Are you," he demanded haughtily, "trying to tell *me* what I am to do? Do you think *I* am taking orders from a sergeant?"

Fleischman looked glum.

"It's not that," he explained. "I'm only telling you for your own good, Lieutenant. You see, our last officer, Lieutenant Beaupré, he was very much like you in many ways. I found him one morning in the oasis with a knife in his kidneys—"

"Oh," said Blaisot. And after a long pause he added, "I didn't know—er—just how he died. And how do you ac-

count for it, Sergeant? What's the matter with the men?"

"If I may say so, they've been here too long, that's the whole trouble," Fleischman confessed. "They think they're never going to leave Kairoum. They're not bad soldiers, if you treat 'em easy. It's this place gets on their nerves."

Blaisot had been at Kairoum not quite two weeks.

He shrugged this suggestion aside.

"What do they expect? Six months' leave in Paris every year? How long have you been here yourself?"

"Since last October, Lieutenant. And as God is my witness, I'll be out of my mind if I'm not transferred pretty soon." The muscles of his face twitched as he spoke. "It's a strain going to bed at night wondering if you'll be alive the next morning. Queer things happen here. It's best to shut both eyes. And if I may make a suggestion, Lieutenant; if I were you, I'd tell headquarters about it."

"You're demoralized," sniffed Blaisot. "You and the whole detachment. I'll smarten up this outfit, if it's the last thing I do on earth."

It was an empty promise. He could not fight the mass inertia of sixty men. Insensibly his efforts relaxed, and as the days slipped away his attitude underwent a change. Because of the heat, parades were out of the question except at dawn and dusk. Whichever way he turned, the desert confronted him, and he came to hate its desolate immensity. The *bled el khouf*, the Arabs called it, the land of fear.

Never before had he been so completely alone. Never before had the earth seemed so vast and pitiless. It dwarfed him and his gold stripes into insignificance. At night an enormous silence weighed down upon him, ringing in his ears, until he longed for the crowds and the noise of Ménilmontant. In Morocco he had been thrown with other men. Here a gulf separated him from his fellow creatures. He was compelled to eat alone, to sleep in a room by himself. Off duty, there was nowhere for him to go, no one for him to talk to.

When at the end of two months a camel caravan plodded in with supplies, he sent out a long report full of protests and recriminations. He had to wait two more months for an answer:

> The remarks contained in your Report Serial No. 781 have been duly noted and filed for future reference.
>
> A reenforcement draft of twenty men will be dispatched at an ulterior date.
>
> Your transfer to the zone of operations in Morocco can not be taken into consideration at present.
>
> Colonel Tacheron, commanding the Bechar area, is surprised that such a request should have been made. He expects his officers, when confronted by a difficult situation, to deal with it to the best of their ability, not to evade it by applying for a transfer.

Blaisot crumpled the message in his fist, flung it to the floor and kicked it. He saw through the whole dirty business at last! He had been sidetracked —shoved into this hell hole—simply because he was a ranker, because the St. Cyr-trained officers were afraid he would steal a march on them.

That night he drank two bottles of wine and several glasses of cognac with his dinner. He was mildly intoxicated when he went to bed. Just enough to make him forget his troubles. The following night he drank a little more, and started a little earlier.

Thereafter, step by step, he went downhill. He forgot to put on his belt when he went on parade; he forgot to shave for a week; he slopped around the drill ground with a pair of carpet slippers on his feet and a charred cigaret butt stuck to his lower lip.

It did not happen from one day to the next. There were spells when he pulled himself together, cursing and storming because his orders were not properly carried out. A general housecleaning would ensue, several men would be marched away to the guardhouse—then his anger would fizzle out and in a

little while he would be locked in his room again deadening his brain with cheap cognac.

Between spasms, Sergeant Fleischman ran the outfit as best he could. In his dealings with Blaisot he was as impersonal and wooden as a cigar store Indian, treating him always, whether drunk or sober, with all the respect due to his rank.

BLAISOT was lying stark naked on his cot late one afternoon in July, when Fleischman rapped on the door.

"The convoy has been sighted, Lieutenant," he announced. "It will be here in an hour."

"That's all right." Blaisot yawned. "I'll be ready." He motioned toward the table which was cluttered with bottles and soiled glasses. "Why not have a drink, flint face? It will do you good. Help yourself. There's some wine and a little rotgut—at least it ought to be there if that damned orderly hasn't guzzled it all."

Fleischman shook his head.

"I am not thirsty, Lieutenant."

"Who cares whether you're thirsty or not? Have a drink and act sociable, you gloomy idiot."

"I have also to report," Fleischman went on, "that the Beni Saffra are nearing the oasis. They are coming down from the north."

Blaisot got up and filled two glasses brimful of cognac.

"Just a bunch of lousy niggers," he commented. "Here, swallow this—you'll feel better."

"No, thank you," Fleischman said deliberately. "I am a sergeant. Officers do not drink with their subordinates."

"That's true too," snapped Blaisot. "I wouldn't drink with you if you were the last man on the face of God's earth, you damned Prussian!" He poured the cognac down his throat at one gulp. "How dare you suggest that I was offering you a drink?" he went on angrily. "Don't you know who you're dealing with? I am an officer. My family is one of the best families in Taverny. I'm connected with the Pasquiers—biggest bankers in Paris. Don't run away with the idea that *I* have to stay here in this rotten dump. It's a lie. All I have to do is snap my fingers and I'll be out of here in a week. But I'm not ready to leave just yet."

Fleischman had been listening to Blaisot's boasts for nearly six months. He had been given to understand at one time or another that the lieutenant was related to viscounts, ministers, bankers, several prominent deputies, and a millionaire chocolate manufacturer. Blaisot's pedigree, however, left him icy.

"I have made arrangements for the accommodation of the reenforcement draft," he explained. "It is due today, I believe. Our ration allowance will have to be changed."

"We've been expecting that draft for the best part of a year," retorted Blaisot. "You talk too much, squarehead, and you take too much for granted. Get out of my sight!"

The convoy arrived while he was struggling into his tunic. When he stepped down into the yard it was full of camels and goats and yelling Arab drivers.

Drawn up in front of the office, twenty dust caked Legionnaires awaited his pleasure.

"The new draft, Lieutenant," announced Fleischman. "All present and correct."

He had to shout to make himself heard, for bedlam had broken loose in the oasis. The Beni Saffra were swarming around the spring with their flocks and their women and their tents. Blaisot had not heard so much noise in months. A cloud of dust, kicked up by thousands of hoofs, filled the air.

"We ought to pepper the swine with a machine gun," he said angrily. "There won't be a drop of water left when they're through."

"All arrangements have been made," Fleischman assured him. "The water

tanks were filled as soon as I saw them coming. Perhaps, Lieutenant, you would like to inspect the draft. These men have marched forty-five kilometers since morning."

"Have they?" snapped Blaisot. "What of it? It'll do 'em good."

From his breastpocket he drew a monocle which he screwed into his right eye. A monocle, he believed, was particularly impressive. He kept it for special occasions. Just to be on the safe side, in case an officer had accompanied the supply convoy, he had put on his second-best uniform and his medals. Moreover, he had had a shave, so that he looked very spruce and smart as he walked slowly past the Legionnaires.

Suddenly, midway down the line, he drew himself up with a jerk. His heart not only stopped dead, it fell down into the pit of his stomach.

In front of him, staring straight into his eyes, stood Fourment and Tennant. Their emaciated faces, lined with suffering and fatigue, were altogether expressionless. They seemed to be made of stone.

The shock drove the alcohol fumes out of Blaisot's brain. On the instant he was painfully and completely sober. He could not afford to stay rooted to the ground, gaping like a fool at a couple of Legionnaires! He must do something—anything to break the spell. With a wrench he moved toward Tennant.

"We have met before, I believe," he said in a sharp, clear voice. "Your name is—?"

"243,599, Soldier of the Second Class, Tennant, William."

"Yes, I remember you. And what unit were you with before you were sent to Kairoum?"

"Military Detention Camp No. 8." There was a wicked glitter in Tennant's eye as he spoke, and after a barely perceptible pause, he added, "Lieutenant."

Coming from him, that final word, which ought to have been a term of respect, was an insult.

"So you've been in prison," commented Blaisot. "What for?"

"Refusing to obey an order. There was a corporal in our company who thought he could get me to clean his equipment—"

"Keep the details to yourself! That will do!" Blaisot turned to Fourment. "And you—where have you been?"

"Military Detention Camp No. 8. Five years at hard labor for striking a so-called sergeant. I was released two weeks ago."

"Well, I hope they drilled some sense into your heads," Blaisot snapped. "Bear this in mind, *mes amis:* if you try to make any more trouble I shall—er—meet you more than halfway every time."

They didn't move a muscle, but they were laughing at him nonetheless, and he knew it. In half an hour every man in the blockhouse would be aware of the fact that Lieutenant Jules Blaisot was an apache from the slums of Ménilmontant.

"No," he said to himself, "I won't allow it. I'll make 'em keep quiet. I'll find a way."

As soon as he finished the inspection, he said to Fleischman:

"I want to speak to those two men, Tennant and Fourment. They are difficult cases—but they're not really bad. I think a good talking-to will start them off right foot foremost. March them over to my hut at once. I'll speak to them in there."

"Just as you wish, *mon Lieutenant,*" agreed Fleischman. "And may I add that the *kaid* of the Beni Saffra sent word just before you came out that he will call later on this evening to pay his respects."

"And you can tell him from me to go hang himself! I haven't any time to waste on a bunch of fleabitten desert rats. Who do they think I am? One of their bosom friends? In Morocco, *bon dieu,* we used to fill 'em full of lead when they came too close."

Two minutes later Fleischman

marched the two Legionnaires into the whitewashed cubicle Blaisot referred to as his living room.

"I don't need you," Blaisot told the sergeant. "You have quite enough to do getting the stores put away. I'll take charge of these men."

"JUST close that door, will you, Tennant?" Blaisot went on as soon as the sergeant was out of sight. "That's much better. We don't need an audience."

"What's on your mind?" drawled Fourment. "Spit it out. We've been marching for a week to reach this blockhouse. I need a rest."

"I'll bet you do!" Blaisot agreed sympathetically. "Sit down, my old one. Don't bother about these stripes of mine. We're not going to make a fuss about rules and regulations. Tennant, take the other chair. I'll hoist myself on to the table."

"I can't get over it," Tennant confessed. "A lieutenant! Fast work, Blaisot. And I see they handed you the Legion of Honor. That is something! Next time I come out of prison I suppose you'll be a major-general."

"You know how it is—" Blaisot grinned—"I've had lots of luck. I may be going to the staff college one of these days."

"Luck!" Fourment broke in. "If that adjutant hadn't butted in when he did—"

"That's all over and done with," Blaisot said quickly. "We're not going to squabble about things that happened five years ago. Let's forget all that. Let's have a drink! How about a drop of cognac to take the soreness out of your muscles?"

"I haven't had a drink since Hector was a pup," exclaimed Tennant. "Sure, bring on your firewater. But I'm so astonished I'm gasping. You notice how I'm gasping, don't you? Why all the lavishness, Lieutenant? You have no more cause to love me than I have to love you. Still—" he grabbed one of the glasses Blaisot had filled—"here's to your Legion of Honor. They tell me you have to work hard to unhook one of those gewgaws."

Blaisot refilled the glasses, not once, but many times.

"We're still in the dark," Fourment reminded him. "You can't make me believe you asked us in here just to fill us full of cognac and to talk about the good old days. Good old days—nothing! Good old hell. I'm not that kind of an imbecile. You're an officer and we're a pair of jailbirds. We don't talk the same language any more. Come on, let's get the agony over."

"That's it." Blaisot nodded. "That's just it." He cleared his throat. "I am an officer. And the men think I am like all other officers. You know what I mean," he said desperately, "a good family and all that sort of thing. If they found out about me, my authority would be gone."

Fourment passed one hand over his mouth to hide a smile.

"I could tell 'em a thing or two!" He chuckled. "Remember the inspector you plugged outside the Bal du Pétrin, ha-ha! And the months you spent picking hemp at Melun! *Bon dieu,* what a joke! I'll say you've got a good family. I could write a book about it. How's that bottle holding out?" he broke off. "I could do with another drop."

"Help yourself," urged Blaisot. "There's plenty more." He ran his fingers through his hair. "Yes—I have to be careful. Things are in bad shape here just now, and I don't want to make them any worse. I've been sick and the detachment's not up to the mark. Fact is, I've had to depend too much on that sour faced sergeant. He's rubbed everybody the wrong way."

"And they think you're a bourgeois!" Fourment laughed. "What do you care what anybody thinks? You're got your stripes and your medals, haven't you?"

"That's only one side of it. If it ever leaked out that I come from Ménilmontant—and people started making in-

quiries—can't you see? I'd be kicked out at a second's notice. They don't want officers who have been—"

"Apaches," Fourment finished the sentence for him.

"That's one thing they haven't found out yet," Blaisot said bitterly. "But they do know I'm a ranker, and they hate my guts because I've got the Legion of Honor and the Military Medal. They're jealous—they're afraid I'll tread on their toes." He was leaning forward, talking as fast as he could talk, pouring out all the venom he had stored up in his tormented soul. "That's why they sent me down here—to get me out of the way. If I make one mistake I'll never be given a second chance. Never!"

"Who's 'they'?" inquired Tennant, helping himself to one of the lieutenant's cigarets. "You're hard to follow."

"The dirty snobs at headquarters." Blaisot struck the table with his clenched fist. "You'll soon find out what this place is like. It's worse than any prison. If I didn't take a drink now and then to steady my nerves, I'd go crazy. They're just waiting for a chance to trip me up, the lousy swine!" His voice shook uncontrollably. "But I'll hang on. They're not going to get me, not if they leave me here for the next fifty years."

"That's great," admitted Tennant, who was blowing smoke rings up at the ceiling. "I admire your amazing determination. But would you mind telling me just where we fit in? What have we to do with the trials and tribulations of Jules Blaisot, lieutenant by the grace, presumably, of God?"

"Don't let me down," pleaded Blaisot. "Don't tell anybody about me. I'm trusting you—you're old friends. Of course you are! We've had our disagreements, but they're forgotten. I'm mighty glad to have you here with me, and that's the truth. I haven't had a man to talk to for six months!"

Fourment squinted at him through the bottom of his empty glass.

"*Eh bien,* my brave fellow," he murmured, "you'll never know how glad I am I didn't kill you. It's good to see you squirm! By God, it is!"

Blaisot laid a palsied hand on his arm.

"You don't mean that. Listen, Henri. If you'll stand by me I'll make a corporal out of you within twenty-four hours. That's a promise. And you too, Tennant. Full corporals—two stripes. I'll treat you like friends. Open house. Come in here at any time—"

Tennant cut him short.

"Wake up! Why should we help you? I don't want your stripes, not at any price. I'm much obliged for the cognac, but that's as far as it goes."

"Money?" hazarded Blaisot, putting his hand to his pocket.

"In about one more second you'll make me vomit," rasped Tennant. "Medals don't make any difference—you're a coward. I'm telling you straight. We heard all about Kairoum before we got here. They send the bad eggs here for a rest cure. That's not my idea of a good billet. I'm not interested in you, Blaisot. Not a bit. You'll have to take your beating."

"And he makes such an elegant officer," jeered Fourment. "You might almost think he was born with a monocle in his eye, the little rascal."

Blaisot tried to speak, but Tennant silenced him:

"Wait! I'll make a deal with you, Blaisot. This is your life—you like it. That's your business. I don't like it. I started out wrong foot foremost, and I've been out of step ever since. Here's my proposition: Help us to desert and I'll promise to tell the gang you're the very own son of the president of the Republic. If that doesn't suit, we'll say you're an archduke. Take it or leave it. I'm willing to wait two weeks. After that, if I want to talk I'll talk. Call it blackmail if you like. It's all one to me. How about it, Fourment? Are you game?"

"For exactly fourteen days—yes."

Blaisot swallowed a glass of cognac.

"All the wells are guarded—" he began. Then, abruptly, he saw a way out of his quandary. "*Ça va!*" he shouted. "I've got it. Just the thing. You want to get out of the army? Fine! You'll be on your way in twenty-four hours, and I'll guarantee a safe journey clear through to Rio del Oro. That's Spanish territory."

"How?" Tennant inquired suspiciously. "I don't trust you, Blaisot. I want to be sure I'll reach Rio del Oro alive and kicking."

Blaisot pulled back his sleeves like a conjurer about to perform a trick.

"Perceive—there is nothing up my sleeves, messieurs! I would not deceive you. No, indeed! The performance will take place right before your very eyes. You will be able to follow each and every move. Now watch carefully for the birdie, if you please!"

IN TWO strides he reached the door and wrenched it open.

"Sergeant Fleischman," he called out. "I want you at once!"

"You two," he said over his shoulder, "don't give the show away. Stand up and look soldierly."

Fleischman came trudging out of the darkness.

"That *kaid* you mentioned a while ago," snapped Blaisot. "I suppose I've got to see him. Go fetch him. Don't be long."

"He is here," said Fleischman. "He has been waiting for an hour."

"Trot him in."

"Shall I march the Legionnaires away, *mon Lieutenant?*"

"Yes, of course," agreed Blaisot. Then he pretended to change his mind. "Come to think of it, they might as well mount guard in here while I am interviewing the chief. It will look better if I have an escort."

Fleischman beckoned to two muffled figures squatting against the wall.

"Muhammad abd el Chetiff," he announced, "*kaid* of the Beni Saffra and his son, Hafid ben Muhammad."

The *kaid* bowed as he entered the room and carried his fingertips to his forehead—the formal gesture of obeisance. He was a tall old man, quite unlike the petty chieftains Blaisot had seen in Morocco. This Arab, wrapped in the folds of an immaculately white *burnous,* carried himself with the dignity and self-possession of a king. His sharp featured countenance, wrinkled with age, was magnificent in his quiet power.

He squatted on the floor, facing Blaisot.

"The *kaid* speaks little French," explained the other native, a hawkeyed, black bearded warrior. "I speak in his name. He comes with peace in his heart—"

"*Tu l'as dit!* You said it." Blaisot grinned, trying to talk down to these humble savages. "People who won't talk peace to me have a way of dying young."

"We have brought the *aman,* the presents," Hafid went on, "and my father begs you to accept them: two rams and some sheep. Our flocks prospered in the hills where the grass was sweet. And there is a Meknes stallion—"

"That's great! Tell your papa I'm much obliged to him. I'll look at the livestock later on."

The Arabs exchanged a few words in a guttural undertone. The old man held up one hand and let it drop slowly into his lap.

"It is well," said Hafid. "The *kaid* says, 'Let the sidi-officer examine the presents in his own time, according to the customs of his people. The ways of the French are not our ways. Allah made all men different, and wisdom lies in strange places.' "

"He said all that, did he? What I want to know is this: when you leave Kairoum which way are you heading?"

"Toward the salt marshes of Timahl."

"That's near the Rio del Oro border, isn't it?"

"Over and beyond the border, Sidi."

Blaisot drew a deep breath and plunged in.

"There's something you can do for me," he declared. "Get this straight because it's important. These two men, friends of mine, are secret agents of the government. They want to reach Spanish territory without attracting attention. Nobody must find out who they are. They're on a mission. It's so secret that they came as far as Kairoum disguised as Legionnaires. Will you take charge of them and see that they reach Spanish territory?"

Again the Arabs conferred. They stared hard at Tennant and Fourment who, to while away the time, were emptying the dregs out of the various bottles on the table.

"They travel on government business?" Hafid inquired.

"That's what I just got through telling you. Keep your ears open. But you must promise not to say a word to any one, not even the Frenchmen you meet."

"French soldiers are not welcome across the border."

"I don't suppose they are," snapped Blaisot, irritated by the natives' lack of enthusiasm. "I want you to provide these messieurs with the proper clothing so that they may pass unnoticed. The government will not forget your assistance." He drew a wallet from his pocket. "If you agree, I am empowered to pay you the sum of five hundred francs. That's a lot of money."

The *kaid* spoke sharply.

"No money," Hafid explained. "The government honors our clan by asking a favor of us. There can be no question of payment. Our tents shall be the tents of your envoys, and our salt their salt. Our lips are sealed and our eyes are blind."

"Hear that!" crowed Blaisot. "It's done! Free passage all the way to the sea. And not a chance of being discovered!" He winked at Fourment. "Won't the government be pleased? I knew we could depend upon the Beni Saffra, the best little tribe in the desert!"

Fourment stood up. His eyes were glassy. Swaying unsteadily he crossed the room and thrust a mug full of wine under the *kaid's* nose.

"You're a good fellow," he hiccoughed. "I like you. A man after my own heart, that's what you are. Here's a drink—it won't cost you a sou."

Hafid pushed him away.

"It is against our law," he declared. "The Koran forbids the use of alcohol."

The wine slopped out of the glass and fell on to the old man's knees. He spoke very quietly to his son.

"What's the matter with this wine?" protested Fourment, waving the mug in the *kaid's* face. "Don't you like wine?"

Hafid thrust him aside. Fourment lurched backward, tripped over his own feet and sat down heavily.

"It is the law," Hafid repeated. "The *kaid* has been defiled by that dog."

THE Arabs Blaisot had met up north had not been such strict followers of the Koran. Those he had come in contact with—camp followers and other dubious folk—drank whatever they could beg or steal.

"Don't you call my men dogs," he protested. "What's the idea of knocking him down because he offers your papa a drink. That's not a clever thing to do."

He was none too sober himself.

"And what's wrong with my wine anyway?" he went on, growing more and more indignant. "When I offer a man a drink in my own house I expect him to take it. That's hospitality."

Grabbing a bottle he filled three mugs full to overflowing.

"You're going to apologize for having knocked down an agent of the French government. And after that, monkey face, we'll drink a toast to the success of the undertaking. Then we'll be friends again."

"He fell because he was drunk," Hafid pointed out. "I am not sorry."

"You're as stubborn as a donkey! But you're not going to wipe your feet on Monsieur Fourment, not while I'm in command of this blockhouse. Take these mugs, and when I say *'Salut!'* you drink."

"Hold his nose and pour it down his gullet," urged Fourment.

Tennant said nothing for the good reason that he was fast asleep with a happy smile on his parted lips.

"We can not break our faith," Hafid protested.

"You tell the chief," rasped Blaisot, "that he can't come in here and insult me."

Without haste the *kaid* rose.

"We must go," said Hafid. "In the morning—"

"So you're going to walk out on me!" cried Blaisot. "Why, you fleabitten blackguard, I've got a good mind to shove you in a cell until morning. Sit down until I'm through with you. Hunker down on your hams!"

The *kaid* looked at him with such infinite scorn in his eyes that Blaisot felt himself shriveling up. He reacted violently. Without stopping to weigh the consequences of his act, he slung the contents of the mug full in the old man's face.

"When I tell you to do a thing—" he began.

He got no farther. Hafid leaped at him. Brown fingers closed around his throat. He pitched over backward, and as he went down he jerked his revolver from its holster. He jammed the gun into the native's stomach and pulled the trigger. Once! A quiver ran through Hafid's body. Twice—and his grip relaxed. A third time—and he pitched forward on to his face.

Blaisot heaved the body aside and struggled to his feet. A lock of hair hung down over his eyes. Hard-mouthed and cruel he faced the *kaid*.

"Maybe you want a few holes in your hide too?" he rasped. "Get out of here and take that lump of filth with you. Another time you'll have more sense than to try that sort of thing with me."

The sound of the shots had drawn a crowd. The doorway was full of goggle eyed, gabbling troopers. Sergeant Fleischman burst into the room. Even Tennant was wide awake.

Blaisot pulled himself together.

"He tried to knife me," he snapped. "Must have gone mad. Thank the lord I had enough foresight to keep these men in here as a bodyguard. Are you hurt, Fourment?"

Fourment was not hurt.

"That's good. You—" Blaisot motioned to the *kaid*—"don't you hear when you're spoken to? In one more minute I'll put you under arrest."

Without a word, very gently, the *kaid* gathered his son's dead body in his arms.

"Kick him out," ordered Blaisot. "Him and his presents. He's a treacherous swine. Don't let him in here again, Sergeant."

The crowd melted away, trailing across the courtyard in the old man's wake.

"That leaves us high and dry," commented Tennant. "Judging by the dirty look he gave you, I don't think it would be healthy for us to travel with him."

"I suppose not," admitted Blaisot, gnawing at his lower lip. "But I'll fix something. Leave it to me. In two weeks you'll be out of here. That's a promise. Meanwhile, not a word, eh? I'm trusting you. Is it a bargain?"

Fourment nodded.

"I'll wait, but don't keep me hanging around too long. I've had a skinful of this army."

"Fine! You'd better clear out now. That damn sergeant will be along in another minute. I know him. We'll have another party one of these days before you leave. And if those Arabs try to start something, we'll give 'em a dose of lead poisoning!"

The "damn sergeant" bumped into them as they lurched out of the hut. They did not move out of his way fast enough to suit him, and a bony elbow crashed into Fourment's ribs.

"Can't you look where you're going?" Fourment protested.

"And who do you think you're talking to?" roared Fleischman. "Keep a civil tongue in your head when you speak to me, Legionnaire. Don't forget that I'm a sergeant—with fourteen years of honorable service behind me. There are some things I will not stand for, and one of them is disrespect from a gutter rat like you. You're not the first ruffian I've had to deal with. I know your breed. I spotted you when you marched in through the gate. On your way. March!"

He addressed his remarks to Legionnaire Fourment, but every word he uttered was clearly audible to Lieutenant Blaisot. And Blaisot's ears burned as though they had been massaged with a redhot iron. Fleischman had fourteen years' service behind him, had he? The poor squarehead! Fourteen years' service in the ranks. Why boast about it? It only went to show that he was too dumb to climb any higher.

"If he's not careful," muttered Blaisot, "I'll rip those stripes off his arm."

Fleischman, however, had his emotions under full control when he stepped across the threshold. He came up to attention with the rigid precision of an automaton. The lieutenant's orders had been carried out, he explained. He had escorted the *kaid* as far as the gate, and had returned the presents, namely two rams, eight sheep and one bay stallion. Furthermore, he had doubled the number of men on guard duty and had placed a lookout on the watchtower.

"What's the idea?" demanded Blaisot. "*You* doubled the guard; *you* posted more sentries! Who gave you the authority to do so?"

"The Beni Saffra are a fighting clan," Fleischman said stolidly. "A surprise attack might—"

Blaisot clenched his fists so tightly that the nails bit into his palms.

"That does not answer my question. Who empowered you to make these changes?"

"No one, *mon Lieutenant.* I used my own judgment. If an emergency should arise—"

"What kind of an emergency?"

"The Beni Saffra can muster five hundred rifles. They are an independent people. Up there in the hills they are constantly at war with their neighbors. They fight—"

Blaisot swept these considerations aside.

"Has it entered your thick skull that in this instance you have overstepped your authority?"

"No, *mon Lieutenant.* It is not the first time I have been compelled to act without consulting you."

"Don't hint. Say what you're thinking, squarehead."

"I mean, *mon Lieutenant,* that in many instances you have not been in a state to issue adequate orders. Tonight—"

Blaisot's self-control snapped.

"You insolent fool of a Prussian," he yelled, "are you trying to tell me that I'm too drunk to know what I'm doing? Answer me, you dummy!"

Squat, chunky, square hewn, Fleischman weathered the storm.

"You must draw your own conclusions, *mon Lieutenant.* If we are attacked—"

"Attacked, attacked, attacked!" parroted Blaisot. "You're mad! You're insane! Attacked by those savages because one of them got shot? Don't be absurd. They'll have a great deal more respect for us now they know they can't take any liberties with us. But I'm on to your dirty, underhanded tricks. You're trying to step into my boots—trying to make the men believe you're running the whole show. This time you've gone too far. You're through. Back to the ranks you go, you and your fourteen years of honorable service. That's where you belong. Get out of here and countermand that order. Take the extra men off duty and then place yourself under arrest. You'll soon find out whether I'm drunk or sober!"

CRASH! Sharp and clear above the uneasy stillness which had settled over the blockhouse, a single shot rang out, followed instantly by a prolonged burst of fire, which petered out and stopped as abruptly as it had begun.

Before the echo died away, Blaisot was out of the hut, shouting orders at the top of his lungs, blundering about in the courtyard where the camels and the horses of the supply convoy were tethered.

He grinned all to himself in the darkness. He was back in harness again, thank God, at grips with a real enemy—an enemy he could hurt and maul. He'd show the Beni Saffra a thing or two! He'd blow them into the middle of next week!

The men on guard duty blazed away through the loopholes in the general direction of the oasis, while the bulk of the detachment was being mustered on the drill ground. Speed! In ten minutes every man was at his appointed post with a hundred rounds of ammunition in his pouches.

"Wait for the order!" the noncoms shouted. "Don't fire until you get the order. Stand steady!"

As the last squad swung into position, Blaisot raced toward the watchtower. Midway across the courtyard, in among the stamping horses, he came upon Fleischman holding a lantern high above his head. In the excitement of the moment, Blaisot forgot how much he loathed this stolid Prussian. He was bubbling over with good humor.

"Let 'em come!" He laughed. "We're ready for them. Seen anything stirring outside?"

"No, *mon Lieutenant,* but—"

"I'm going up top. I can spot the flashes of their guns and see which way they're coming."

"They are not firing now, *mon Lieutenant.* They have not fired a shot since the first volley. This—" he held out a piece of brown paper—"this was thrown over the gate, wrapped around a stone. It is for you."

Blaisot snatched at the paper.

"What the devil is all this about?" he grumbled. "Writing? Hold the lantern over this way."

The message read:

From Muhammad abd el Chetiff, kaid of the many clans of the Beni Saffra:

Praise be to Allah, the One True God, most Merciful and Compassionate.

To the Franks at the oasis called Kairoum:

Our faith has been besmirched; our son has been murdered.

For these calamities there was no cause save the great evilness of one man. And this man alone is to blame. He is a dog without honor or shame or pride.

We went into his dwelling, unarmed, bearing gifts.

With his own hands he spilled the blood of our son Hafid, who was his guest.

He shall pay with his blood for the blood he spilled. Him we shall slaughter as we would slaughter some unclean and slavering beast, and we shall not swerve from our purpose even though we climb breast high over our own dead to reach him.

Blaisot stared uneasily at the sergeant.

"Has anybody seen this?" he demanded.

"I have, *mon Lieutenant.* No one else."

"You read it?"

"Yes. It fell at my feet."

"It's a pack of lies!" Blaisot burst out. "He tried to kill me. I can prove it. They were aching for a chance to start a fight."

"It is not my place to have any opinions about such matters," Fleischman declared. "I am at your orders, *mon Lieutenant.*"

"To the very end?"

"Of course, *mon Lieutenant.*"

"You stiff-necked Prussian!" exulted Blaisot. Impulsively he held out his hand. "I'm sorry I lost my temper, Sergeant. Will you shake hands with me?"

Fleischman did so, but he made no comment.

"We'll tie these Beni Saffra up in knots," promised Blaisot. "Wait until they rush us. We'll mess them up!"

But the hours went by, and the white hot sun swept above the horizon before another shot was fired.

Crouching behind the ramparts on the watchtower, Blaisot saw that the oasis was empty. Far away to the southward a pillar of dust drifted across the floor of the desert. It was so remote that it appeared no larger than the palm of a man's hand, yet Blaisot knew that it marked the passage of ten thousand trampling hoofs.

"They've cleared out!" he told the blear eyed machine gun crew squatting beside him. "We've lost a night's sleep and not a thing to show for it."

He stood up, stretching his arms above his head, and fifty rifles spat lead at him. The Beni Saffra had not cleared out. They had sent away their women and their flocks, but the warriors remained. They did not attempt to rush the blockhouse. They sat tight and waited. Whenever a head showed above the ramparts they blazed away until it vanished.

Blaisot, however, quickly cured them of indiscriminate sniping. He made a dummy out of a pillowcase stuffed with straw and a *képi,* which he hoisted above the wall, and as soon as the Arabs opened fire, he caught them very neatly at their own game, pouring salvo after salvo into them. It cost a great deal of ammunition, but it worked. Thereafter the Beni Saffra sharpshooters stayed under cover.

The morning wore away. The sun climbed high in the sky.

"What are they waiting for?" fumed Blaisot, glaring at the empty desert. "If it's a fight they want, why don't they come and get it?"

Fleischman answered one word—

"Water." He tugged at his gray mustache. "Water," he repeated. "With the supply convoy animals to take care of, the tanks will be empty before nightfall."

The news did not perturb Blaisot.

"When I want water," he swore, "I'll get all I want, and those savages can't stop me."

But they did stop him. When the gates swung open and he raced toward the spring with a squad of twenty men, he was met by a gust of bullets which snuffed out half his force before he was well under way. Though the machine guns swept the oasis, and the Legionnaires fired as fast as they could load, the Beni Saffra blazed away until the gates closed upon Blaisot and his battered squad.

"We'll try again!" Blaisot declared. We'll get there!"

The spring was not more than two hundred yards away, under the trees, at the end of a path lined with whitewashed stones. It might as well have been at the other end of the earth.

Blaisot made three attempts to reach it, and all three failed disastrously. To save the last few gallons in the tanks, the horses and camels of the convoy were turned loose. The Arabs shot them down as they galloped frantically toward the oasis.

BEFORE the following morning, the last drop of water was gone. The canteen wine and the brandy lasted another twenty-four hours. Then the end was in sight. In that climate no man can go for more than a day without water and live.

"They're not going to get us like this!" croaked Blaisot. "Come on, *mes enfants,* we'll make one more dash. The last one! Who'll volunteer to go with me?"

Two men, and only two, answered his call: Sergeant Fleischman and Tennant.

"You want to volunteer?" exclaimed Blaisot.

"Sure. Why not?" Tennant nodded, rolling a pebble around on his tongue. "If you've got enough nerve to go out there again, I'm willing to keep you company. If we stay in here we'll die of thirst—if we go out we'll get shot. What's the odds?"

"You said—" Blaisot began.

"This is different," Tennant asserted. "This isn't forming fours on a parade ground. We're in a jam. While it lasts I'm with you."

"Right! I understand. Sergeant, I can't use you. You're the second in command. But—" he turned to the weary men crouching in the narrow strip of shade at the base of the rampart—"but I can't go out with only one Legionnaire. I need every man who'll volunteer. This time we'll go out and smash 'em!"

They stared at him in sullen silence.

"You cowards!" he cried. "Are you going to lie down and allow these savages to—"

Fourment shuffled forward, holding his rifle in the crook of his arm. He glared defiantly at Blaisot as he said:

"You want volunteers, do you? You're not going to get 'em. Who the devil is going to volunteer to get killed for you?"

"How dare you speak in that fashion to an officer!" thundered Fleischman. "One more word out of you—"

Blaisot silenced him.

"I'll deal with this man, Sergeant. Leave him to me."

"We'll see about that," jeered Fourment. "Who started this *tapage?* You did! You murdered that Arab. I was there—I saw you do it! Because of you, half the detachment's been snuffed out. They're out there, with their bellies swelling up and bursting open because they were stupid enough to follow you. Sniff the air—you can smell 'em. And you want more volunteers! Not much! Nobody's going to follow an apache! That's what you are—an apache. You ought to have been guillotined six years ago. And that's the sort of stuff they make officers out of in the Legion! It puts on airs and tries to act like a bourgeois—"

"Are you nearly finished?" Blaisot inquired.

Fourment spat in his face.

"Yes! I'm through. I'm not going to be killed to please you, even if I have to serve your head up on a silver platter to those savages outside."

Blaisot took out a handkerchief and wiped the spittle off his face.

"Do you speak for yourself alone, or for the detachment as a whole?" he inquired, and he was surprised at the steadiness of his voice.

"For the whole crew. They're sick of the sight of you. They know what you're worth. You'd have had a mutiny on your hands long ago if it hadn't been for Fleischman. When you've been too drunk to stand up, he's done your work. But that's over and done with. Not another man is going to die to bolster up your reputation."

Blaisot turned to Fleischman.

"Is this man telling the truth?"

"He ought to be shot!" Fleischman exploded. "The scoundrel! I knew he was up to no good."

His hand closed on the butt of his revolver—and a growl came from the Legionnaires massed by the wall.

"Steady!" ordered Blaisot. "Keep out of this, Sergeant. When I need help, I'll let you know. Hand me your bayonet."

Round eyed with astonishment, Fleischman stared at him.

"Hand it over!" he repeated. "At once!"

The sergeant pulled the blade from the scabbard at his side and proffered it, hilt foremost.

"Thanks."

Blaisot swung around toward Fourment. He spoke very slowly, weighing each word.

"Everything you have said is true—absolutely true. I am what I am—an apache. I can not behave like an officer. It is not in me. I have been weak and I have been afraid." A bitter smile twisted his lips. "Afraid of you. A real officer would have been proof against anything you could have done or said. But the safety of this blockhouse is in my keeping, and while I live you are not going to tell me what I may

or may not do." His voice rang like iron. "I am not afraid of you now, Fourment. You have been asking for this ever since that night at Bou Amara when you wanted to desert. Now's your chance! We'll settle this, apache against apache, with cold steel. I'm waiting!"

Fourment slung his rifle to the ground and whipped out his bayonet.

They came together with the swift, rushing fury of wild animals, fighting to kill. The long, slender blades clashed, leaped apart, and clashed again as the two men milled in a smother of sunlit dust. Then Fourment misjudged his aim, and the mistake cost him his life. It was over in a flash. Ducking under Blaisot's guard, he lunged forward, holding his bayonet at arm's length. The needle point struck Blaisot's belt buckle and broke. Before Fourment could regain his balance, a foot of steel slid into his throat, piercing his spine. He was dead before he touched the ground.

Blaisot wiped the sweat out of his eyes. For a long while he stood motionless, staring down at Fourment's huddled shape.

"A bad character, that one," he heard Fleischman saying. "His influence—"

"Take charge of the detachment," said Blaisot. "I don't think there will be any more trouble."

"How about that water?" a trooper cried. "We're not going to die of thirst!"

Blaisot held up one hand, commanding silence.

"In a very little while," he promised, "you shall have all the water you want."

WITHOUT haste, he walked over to his hut and went into his bedroom. He stripped off his soiled clothes and put on his full dress uniform, the uniform he had never had occasion to wear: scarlet trousers and dark blue tunic with green piping, medals and black patent leather shoes. His lips were pursed in an inaudible whistle as he hooked on his belt and his sword. He could not shave for there was no water, but he took a towel and wiped most of the sweat and grime off his cheeks.

Then he went into the adjoining room and sat down at his desk. For some unfathomable reason, he felt astonishingly contented. His mind was at peace. All the doubt, worry and anxiety which had poisoned his life were at an end.

From a desk drawer he drew a pad, ink and pen. He blew the gritty dust off the pad and wrote:

> *Monsieur the Colonel commanding the Bechar area:*
>
> I have the honor of inclosing herewith a document addressed to me by the *kaid* of the Beni Saffra. This document is self-explanatory. The accusations it contains are substantially correct.
>
> Since the morning of July 8, the Kairoum blockhouse has been besieged by a force of approximately five hundred rifles. All attempts made by the garrison to break through the enemy lines have failed. We have been without water for the past twelve hours.
>
> I consider it my duty to take whatever steps may be necessary to safeguard the lives of my men and appease the grievances of the Beni Saffra.
>
> Consequently, I am turning over the command of the garrison to Sergeant Fleischman, Ulrich, who has shown himself to be a trustworthy noncommissioned officer. Under the most trying circumstances, he has displayed a quiet courage which can not be sufficiently commended.
>
> In conclusion, may I again call your attention to the fact that frequent replacements both of the men and the officers would have a salutary effect upon the morale of the troops at Kairoum?
>
> Please accept, Monsieur the Colonel, the expression of my most distinguished salutations.
>
> —JULES BLAISOT, LIEUTENANT

Beneath his signature he added with a flourish, Officer of the Legion of Honor.

He attached the *kaid's* message to his note and placed both documents in an envelop which he left on his desk.

He put on his *képi* and went out.

There was not a sound. He crossed the courtyard, passing close to Fourment's body.

Fleischman hurried forward. Before he could speak, Blaisot said:

"You are in command, Sergeant. My

time is up. I am going out."

"Going out!" echoed Fleischman.

"That is what I said. I am going out —to get water."

"But—like this—" Fleischman sputtered. "It is not correct! You must not—"

"I know what I have to do," Blaisot assured him. "It is no great hardship."

Tennant stood before him, resting one hand on the iron crosspiece.

"If I were you—" Tennant began.

"Open that gate and let me through," ordered Blaisot. His fingers closed on the hilt of his sword. "Am I in command of this blockhouse or are you?"

Tennant stood aside. As the gate swung open he said—

"By God, *mon Lieutenant,* you're a man!"

"Yes," Blaisot said thoughtfully, "a man of great promise."

And he walked alone down the path between the rows of whitewashed stones, picking his way past the bodies of dead men and dead beasts sprawling in the dust.

His patent leather shoes pinched his toes. They were so tight that he had to tread very deliberately to keep from limping, and the path seemed to stretch out for miles. He recalled that the salesman in the shoe store at St. Maixent had urged him to buy a larger size.

Presently he passed the last corpse and the trees of Kairoum were only a few yards away. Then, as his eyes became accustomed to the shadows, he saw that Muhammad abd el Chetiff was waiting for him. He would have liked to walk with a firmer tread, but the confounded shoes were mangling his toes.

He took off his *képi* and raised it above his head.

"*Vive la Légion, messieurs!*" he called out. "Long live the Legion, gentlemen!"

Fired at pointblank range, a bullet pierced his heart.

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

APROPOS of Bully Hayes, South Seas buccaneer, the Charles E. Luriat Company of Boston kindly send on, with permission to print, the appended excerpts from a biography of Hayes they have just brought out. The author is Basil Lubbock, well known sea writer:

"According to the Honolulu *Advertiser* of September 24th, 1859, William Henry Hayes was born in Cleveland, Ohio, on Lake Erie, in the year 1829. The newspaper, which it must be admitted was no friend of the captain, goes on to state that he was the son of a Cleveland grog shop keeper; that at an early age he was sent to sea as loplolly boy and general roustabout aboard a lake schooner; was married before he was twenty in Cleveland, then got mixed up in a horse-stealing transaction but escaped punishment owing to some legal flaw, and finally fled to San Francisco with Wife No. 2.

"This story was indignantly denied by Hayes in a letter to the Sydney *Morning Herald* of January 12th, 1860, but the wily South Sea filibuster was too cautious to commit anything to paper which might afterwards be brought up against him, and in this letter he makes no mention of his early life beyond declaring that he was in Calcutta in 1852.

"A less likely version of his early days declares that he was born at Cleveland in 1827, was educated at Norfolk and first went to sea in the U S. Revenue Cutter Service, which he soon left owing to a quarrel over a boyhood sweetheart. This account states that he afterwards joined the Navy under Admiral Farragut, but again his career was interfered with by a lady. . . . . Evidently a scandal resulted and Hayes was obliged to resign, after which he is supposed to have served apprenticeship with the thimble-rigging and confidence-trick gentry of New York before setting sail for San Francisco.

"It is hard to say whether there are any grains of truth in this last account. Possibly he did serve in the U. S. Cutter Service on the Great Lakes for a short while, but one thing is certain—he was never an officer in the U. S. Navy, for he was an uneducated man, as is proved by his letters, which were not only ill-spelled but ill-expressed.

"In many ways the character of Bully Hayes ran along the same lines as that of the Klondike bad man, Soapy Smith. Both men were possessed of an altogether amazing amount of nerve—sheer cold, steely, unbreakable nerve; both were bluffers from start to finish; and both used a handsome exterior, a ready smile and a beguiling tongue to hoodwink all and sundry. When flush of cash, Bully Hayes flung his money about in an even more reckless fashion than Soapy Smith, and like Smith he often showed a generous spirit in helping those who were down and out.

"Both the Klondike desperado and the South Sea buccaneer possessed the knack, or perhaps it would be more correct to say a certain peculiar strength of spirit, that could control the most deadly of hair-trigger gunmen, and even rule a large crew of fractious, touchy, queer-tempered outlaws, with an ease and sureness which argued the presence of an unusually masterful and rock-like strain in their natures.

" 'Nothing would serve him but the wild world to walke in,' and thus we find Bully Hayes braving it at sea in some stolen, leaky, ill-found barque rather than lording it at the head of a famous gang of outlaws."

A letter about Hayes from an old reader. I'm sorry we can't call on Captain Raabe, as he suggests, for from last reports that reached this office the Captain was well started on his one-man sailing cruise to the South Seas.

Asbury Park, New Jersey

A correspondent wants to know about Bully Hayes, and it amused me to read some of the things in the piece you recently published about that man.

His name was John Bullard Hayes, and it was his middle name shortened that gave him his nickname. Also, he did not meet his end in a fight, as the piece said was rumored. I could tell you what the end of him really was, but why don't you seek out the man who knows all about Bully Hayes?

That man is our old friend Captain Raabe.

He will probably be too modest to tell you of one incident that happened when he was a member of Hayes' crew Opinions ran high over a certain matter, and Hayes, who was drunk, was cutting a swath for himself through his men with an ax. All of them—they being at the time ashore—took to the bush except young Raabe. He tries to tone his own part down to normal size by saying that "Hayes was drunk and I was, by some chance, half sober." Maybe. But who would have gone in to take the ax away from Hayes, sober or drunk? Remember J. Allan Dunn said, in his letter to the Fire accompanying "The Pigeons of Wong Foo", in effect, that Hayes had disappeared from the South Seas thirty years before *he* was there, but even then his name was used to scare "bad" children with?

WELL, Raabe lunged in and disarmed him, and then took away his sheath knife as well as his ax "so he would not carve somebody up with it when he came to," as the Captain says. And a word to the credit of Hayes himself here, that he was something more than an ordinary "bully." Had he been that, he would have had it in for Raabe afterwards; but he did not hold a single trace of resentment, and laughed heartily at what he considered a joke on himself after he sobered up. He could afford to. That was the only time Hayes was ever downed. Yes, sir, two real men, Hayes and Raabe. Hayes must have had some redeeming qualities otherwise, too; as, if you read "Cannibal Nights", you will see that when young Raabe boarded Hayes' ship to force a fight with Hayes' lieutenant, Mike, Hayes saw to it there was fair play—and more than that, he bet on Mike to make it interesting, because no one else would bet on him.

And he met his death while admiring a moonlight night, standing quietly at the side of his ship, and not in a fight, as was the rumor. A yellow streak, in human form, whom Hayes had rescued from the Spanish penal colony at Guam (your last correspondent had it right about his doing things like helping prisoners to escape from there, and I'll bet the angels have given him some good marks for that) was resentful for something and hit Bully over the back of the head with a boat tiller, sneaking up behind him. And that's all I know about Hayes. But Capt. Raabe knows all about him.

—CONVERSE CLEVELAND

NOTHING conclusive seems ever to have been said about where elephants go when they die. How about the desert burro?

Temple City, California

I have read in Camp-fire the discussions *re* buzzards or vultures and so forth in our deserts, but have yet to note the following question:

What becomes of the dead burro? Have spent the most of thirty years in the Southwest, many of them in the desert and have yet to see the carcass or skeleton of a burro dead from natural cause. Have discussed same with other desert rats, but have no satisfactory answer. Maybe some reader can help.

—GEO. C. WHEATER

MR. E. BRUGUIERE, Ask Adventure expert for Central America, offers a brief comment on our recent (January 1st) article on Nicaragua by Ralph Beardsley:

New York City

I read with a great deal of interest Ralph Beardsley's story, "Dead Men At Logtown". My interest was quite personal because I knew one of the heroes of the tale very well. Lieutenant Clyde Darrah and I were cadets together in Managua when we first entered the Guardia Nacional in August, 1928. Later we were room-mates. During that time I had opportunity for rather intimate insight into Darrah's character. He was a fine man, one of the sort any one can be proud to share the camp-fire with; and incidentally, one of those rare men who fulfill all the requirements of the term "square shooter" in friendship. My only regret has been that I had not the opportunity of knowing Darrah better.

There was a slight inaccuracy in the story that, while relatively unimportant, might bear straightening out. Mr. Beardsley, through Hermann B. Deutsch, says that the Guardia Nacional is "the newly organized Nicaraguan militia . . . which was to take over the job the Marines had been handling in the country during the occupation." In the first place, the present Guardia Nacional was organized almost five years ago—in 1927, by Lt.-Colonel E. R. Beadle, USMC, now retired. In the second place, the Marines at no time handled the job of the Guardia. The Guardia, officered principally by Marines, is fundamentally a military police force.

According to treaty with the United States, Nicaragua is not allowed to have a national army. Consequently the Guardia must fill both rôles. However, never during the Marine occupation have the Marines ever had anything to do with the civil police matters of the country. Anything of this nature, such as the arrest of a civilian, settlement of civil disputes, executing the warrants of civil judges, have always been turned over to the senior Guardia officer of the district.

I know this as a fact because for about two years I was first lieutenant in the Guardia.

—E. BRUGUIERE

BRIAN BORU—a Scandinavian or a Slav? Not within the knowledge of any true Celt!

Pawtucket, Rhode Island

"Lamh Foistinneach an Uachdar!" an echo from the deep shadows along the outer rim of the Camp-fire, where I've held my peace these many a year.

"The gentle hand uppermost!" Well, I wish to insert my gentle hand in this discussion about the Varangian guard. I note in the January 15th issue that Edward L. Crabb's dissertation reads in this manner: "The Islandic sagas are full of mention of individual champions in their ranks. Swend and Canute had consolidated their dominions in the British Isles, and in Ireland Brian Boru was cleaning out most of his opponents."

While I fully agree with Comrade Crabb in what he says about Brian Boru, why mention that? The way he words it would lead people to suppose the famous Brian Boirumhe to have been of Scandinavian or Slavic origin.

For the peace of mind of a hitherto silent member of Camp-fire and the edification of perhaps some others gathered round, let me submit this, my contribution to the circle:

Brian Boirumhe (Brian Boru) born 926, died 1014, son of Cineidi; son of Lorcan; descendant of Olioll-Ollum; descendant of Heber, eldest son of Milesius of Spain.

Boru was king of Munster, and later, on the death of his brother, the *ardrigh* or monarch of all Ireland. "His first effort on becoming monarch was to humble the Danes of Limerick and he slew Ivor, their king, and his two sons." (O'Halloran)

The Anglicized spelling of Boru would easily confuse one, and I'm sure Mr. Crabb will bear me out in this matter of making it clear.

—DONALD O'SULLIVAN

MR. TOOKER, who writes the following, is the author of the recent article in the *Saturday Evening Post* from which several of you quoted, in connection with our current discussion of mountain lions. We are glad to have his contribution to the subject:

Williams, Arizona

Most of the men who live in the woods never hunt, and know nothing about wild life. Mr. L. H. Mahan evidently is one of them. The lion has been the fastest animal on the American continent for one hundred years. I believe the antelope comes next. I have seen a lion catch deer and antelope and one colt, all in straight races, and I'll say that the animals in question did not seem to have a chance.

I have not read Mr. Wells' article on lion. But it's foolish for any one to say that Mr. Wells does not know his lions. While his experience and observations may and no doubt do vary with mine, I believe he wrote what he knows about them. The fact that he never heard a lion scream is not at all surprising; I know of many hunters who have never heard them scream, and there are no doubt thousands that I don't know. I have seen three in the act of screaming, and caught one in the act with the camera. I am sending the editor the photo. I know that the females do scream during mating

season, if there are no male lions about. But that does not prove that Mr. Wells knows nothing about lions. This is a free country, and if Mr. Wells has never heard a lion scream, and does not wish to believe that they do scream, that's his privilege. We can not stop him from writing his opinion, and personally I don't want to.

—JACK TOOKER

And here's another word from Tonto, who gave us quite a talk on the critters not so long ago:

Los Angeles, California

We all know quite a lot about cougars now, and that they have vocal cords to cry out if so inclined. In this particular matter I have wondered how many people have heard a horse scream? It and the cougar yell are the two most similar sounds made. A lot of horsemen never heard a horse scream, but they do in deadly terror or great anger, and sometimes when hurt.

Another interesting question: the weight of a genuine old-time Ursus horribilis, or grizzly bear. Of these I have met a few, some five altogether, in a life spent in rough country most of the time. Kit Carson's closest call was from grizzly. Sublette was killed by one in the Malibu Hills near Santa Monica, California, in the 50's. Grizzlies were more plentiful in early California than hogs, and not one remains alive, or stuffed, to show what he actually was. If any one tells about it people figure he lies or is having a pipe dream, or telling a bear story.

There is a positive record (and the hunter is still alive) that Watson delivered a carcass that dressed 2000 pounds to a San Juan butcher in the 60's for a Christmas display. Major Horace Bell testifies to another weighing 2100 pounds in Los Angeles. I know of another that, cut up for small platform scales, went over 1700 pounds, at Matilija Springs, California. Every year this question will get harder to settle.

—A. L. SPELLMEYER (TONTO)

A READER takes issue with Major Charles G. Percival, of Ask Adventure, on the subject of the Tin Can Tourists. We are glad to have this additional information, and hope to have a word from Major Percival in reply in an early issue:

Jackson, Michigan

I notice in your Dec. 15th number, an inquiry from C. J. Van Housen, Painted Post, N. Y, regarding the so-called Florida campers. This is answered by Major Charles G. Percival, M.D, but not satisfactorily, and I am very glad to be able to give him the information.

The Tin Can Tourists of America was formed a number of years ago, the exact date I do not know. It was about the time that automobiles came into general use. People flocked to Florida in what was at that time abnormal numbers. A very considerable number went in Ford cars. The greater part of them had never seen an orange tree; a large percentage had never camped out before and knew nothing about the many tricks of the experienced camper to promote comfort. And so the municipal camp grounds furnished by the cities along the way became dirty and the orange groves were depleted of fruit by those who we might assume only admired the beautiful trees and fruit, who took possibly but one orange, not knowing of the thousands of cars which followed them.

The fruit growers became frantic; the towns and cities along the way became disgusted; and camping tourists were looked upon as undesirable people. About that time a well-to-do gentleman who by reason of failing health was compelled to lead an outdoor life and camped as a means to an end, called an open meeting of touring campers in some camp ground in Florida, brought these facts before his fellow campers and suggested that an association be formed to stop these objectionable practises and to promote good feeling between the campers and the residents along their routes. As at that time a large part of their food was purchased in the form of canned goods, the before mentioned name was adopted.

AS ANY real old-time tourist camper will recall. the roads between the North and the South at that time were something awful. One article in their obligation was that they would assist fellow tourists in trouble when it could be done without material detriment to themselves. Another was to respect the property rights of residents—which was to cut off the fruit picking evil; and another was that they would leave their camp grounds as clean or cleaner than when they found them. The chief officer of a camp was called the Chief Can Opener.

The municipality authorities along the way were quick to see the benefits of this Order, and frequently gave considerable municipal authority to some camper who contemplated staying in the camp at that particular city. That the object of the Order was good and that it accomplished a lot of good can not be questioned. Particularly at De Soto Park at Tampa, at Bradentown and other camping centers was it active.

Later annual meetings were held at Arcadia. At one time I was head of the camp at Tampa when there were over 4000 campers present. We had weekly dances, card parties, candy pulls, horseshoe pitching contests, morning calisthenics, theatrical performances of a creditable nature, and on Christmas a camp Christmas tree with a present of some character for every man, woman and child in the camp. These things seem to me to be a real service. Campers were frequently called upon to

help others in adversity. The sick were taken care of and in some cases the dead buried in a decent manner.

DURING my term of office I learned that the major part of this class of tourists came from the farming population of Ohio, Indiana, Michigan and Illinois, but there were large numbers of business men, merchants and professional men with a sprinkling of the more wealthy class, who camped out of liking for the manner of touring. Large numbers of theatrical people, more especially vaudeville and circus people, were numbered, and I can not comment too favorably upon their readiness to cooperate and their general happy, gentlemanly and ladylike behavior. It was a pleasure to know them.

The class of conveyance ranged from house cars costing several thousand dollars to an old Model T Ford. Naturally, there were a few so called "highbrows" who did not care to mingle with the common herd and took no part in the ceremonies of the Tin Can Tourists, and it may be that was just as well. Members of this Order purchased the so called Braden Castle grounds at Bradentown, and still have a large camp there, I think. In commenting upon Major Percival's reply, it might be well to say that I have camped for over fifty years, all over the country from Alaska to Mexico and from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and I have tried out and discarded or now own just about every camping article on the market and feel more or less qualified to give Mr. Van Housen the information he failed to secure from Major Percival. In addition, I will add that I am an old-timer, but I have no beard, and this may possibly disqualify me if the Major insists on every Tin Can Tourist wearing a beard. If Mr. Van Housen camps out and can find a camper with a beard and he is a Tin Can Tourist he will find a real good sport nine times out of ten.

—FRED D. CURTIS

THE following came in without name or address. As a rule, such pieces never achieve printing in our columns, but we'll make an exception in this case because the postscript offers, it must be admitted, a weighty excuse!

In any ordinary controversy about this I'd doubtless have been willin' to keep my bazoo closed. In this case the statements of Brother Egelston have caused me to deviate from my rules of life. I'm not going to argue with the good brother, who was a "cowpoke" in Montana. He may have been and a good one. He may also have been a cowpuncher, which is what we called ourselves when I rode the Montana range some twenty-odd years agone by. When he makes remarks about the virtuous and venerated dally-welter man he may believe all he says. He sounds jest like I've heard some of 'em talk. But when any of 'em landed in the double-rig country, where we tie hard an' fast—that line soon became silent. The Brother Egelston mentions his desire to let go his rope in tight places. *There* is the keynote of the dally-welter man, right there. An' all too often he lets his rope go when he merely *fears* he is in a tight place, or that he may lose a finger—like many of the old-timers did. What happens then? You can't let a steer go off with a 40-foot rope hanging to him. It may tangle in brush, trees or rocks and hold the critter there until it starves to death, or coyotes an' wolves finish it off.

I'VE made many a good horse tired an' disgusted while running down a steer with some dally-welter man's rope hangin' to it, whilst the said dally-welter man put in the time in watchful waitin'. I'll take my hat off to a good dally-welter man any day. A *good* dally-welter man is worth watching, I'll admit. But how many of 'em are good—or even fair? The good ones, who never turn a rope loose, generally come to where they part with the ends of several fingers—an' then they ain't good any more.

The tie-hard-and-fast man, generally riding a double-rig saddle, does not figure on turning anything loose, anywhere. What he ropes he keeps—until his saddle is jerked off, if any. He keeps that critter until he's done what he started to do, according to why he roped it. And he'll rope stuff in any kind of country a dally-welter man will, an' in some most of 'em won't. The tie-hard-and-fast man rides a double-rig, three-quarter, or Spanish (single rig with cinch well forward, as in double). Whatever else you may dub him, he is not a quitter! His rope never goes off behind a cow-critter unless his saddle is on the end of it, goin' along too. That is, providin' the rope don't break—when he makes a loop in what's left, an' proceeds. Of course, there's dangers in a tied rope. Get a wrap around your waist with a steer on one end, and your funeral comes next. Likewise, it will pare an arm off you as neatly as any factory machinery could.

But then, what will you, there's dangers in any kind of work. Some bookkeepers get dizzy, get their figgers mixed, and land in jail for embezzlement. (I've read that in the papers.)

—"SAYS ME"

P.S. I'm not signing my name and address for the sake of my wife and the neighbors. They think (the neighbors) that I've been an auto salesman most all my life. If they identified me as an ex-cow-punch I'm afraid the slight deference an' respect I get would disappear. Some would think me a hero, some a liar, and the rest of them a fool. An' the kids who enjoy reading about romantic he-men cowboys . . . . . the good Lord only knows how they'd take it!

Ask Adventure

For free information and services you can't get elsewhere

Whale

THE Greenland right whale can be thankful for bergs, floes, gales and the remoteness of its habitat.

Request:—"I would like to obtain some information about whaling around Greenland. Could you please tell me what kinds of whales are found? What kind of crew does the modern ship carry?"

—NORMAN WILSON, Palmyra, Wisconsin

Reply, by Mr. Victor Shaw:—The species of whale found mostly in Baffin Bay and Davis Strait is the Greenland right whale, which attains a length of from sixty to seventy feet and is polar in habit, not ranging far from the region of bergs and floes. There is a right whale ranging New Zealand waters which is the smallest whalebone mammal known, being but 20 feet. The Southern right whale is found in all temperate seas, and all of this species are especially pursued by whalers and hence have been much reduced in number. There are no sperm whales around Greenland, nor cachelots, sulphur-bottoms, gray or humpback whales, or rorquals. There have been a few of the North Atlantic right whales, a variety mostly confined to regions north of the equator, which differs from the Greenland variety structurally and also to a slight extent from the Southern right and Pacific varieties. Largest whales are sulphur-bottoms and rorquals, which run from 90 to over 100 feet in length.

The Greenland whales run mostly singly or in pairs, not congregating so often in pods, except when attracted to some special feeding ground. Their sense of sight is acute. Usual swimming speed is 4-5 miles an hour, but can exceed that by considerable. A whale mother has great affection for its young, of which whalers take advantage by securing the offspring and thus taking the mother, who will not leave vicinity. Young is suckled on surface, mother rolling from side to side. This species is not particularly vicious, usually fleeing when attacked.

As to value of whale products, today: Substitutes for balene have rendered whalebone of little value compared with past years, but the other products such as spermaceti, oil, etc, have fluctuated and during recent years have risen steadily in value. At present, whalers use every portion of the immense beast for various commercial markets. The modern methods of hunting, with power craft and bomb lances, have made the re-

duction in numbers so marked that in the North Pacific especially many whaling stations have been abandoned because not enough whales could be secured to make operation profitable. This year the number is said to have increased to some extent. This applies to the North Atlantic and Greenland area, also. Many Scotch whalers work on both sides of Greenland, also some Scandinavian whalers. Not so many from either Canada or the U. S. A, though we are still chief in whale products.

The crews of whaling craft include experienced men as a rule, both the hunters and sailors to work the vessel; but there are always some roustabouts, cooks and general utility men. With the advent of steam power, the old whaling voyages of two and three years' duration have largely disappeared. Many whaling stations are located near enough to the hunting area so that the kill may be brought in far more often; in fact, the methods are even termed "shore-whaling." Modern methods and machinery threaten extermination of many species; although there is less real danger in this respect for the Greenland whale than, say, the North Pacific whale, because of its greater remoteness of the field, its rugged uninhabited shores and the greater frequency of dangerous gales and drifting bergs and floes.

Working from shore stations, whales are killed easily when found, inflated with compressed air and towed to the station, where modern machinery swiftly disposes of all but the spout.

Whales run from $4000 to $5000 in value, and the crew usually works on a "lay", or percentage, after expenses are paid. There are several stations on the western coast of Davis Strait, but Greenland is entirely Danish.

Saddlehorse

HEAVY hunter vs. thoroughbred.

Request:—"I am interested in saddlehorses weighing about thirteen to fourteen hundred pounds. This is partly due to the fact that I am myself of sizable proportions and partly because my grandfather imported Percheron stallions from France for many years and I became used to these magnificent horses. In the September 15th issue of *Adventure* you made the statement that draft mares are being bred to thoroughbred stallions to produce heavy hunters. Does this make a satisfactory horse from the standpoint of weight-carrying, stamina and speed? I have heard breeders say that it no longer paid to cross bloodlines, as the result was too uncertain and the colt was a mongrel. Can you describe these crossbred horses to me? Are they graceful of line? I am planning to breed saddlehorses as an avocation. If I selected a good thoroughbred stud and several good draft mares, similar in type, could I, by inbreeding over a period of years, produce a horse possessing the qualifications of a hunter, or good, all-around saddlehorse, and running true to type?

Are there strains of thoroughbreds that weigh thirteen or fourteen hundred pounds?"

—CHAS. E. COLEMAN, Wayne, Illinois

Reply, by Mr. Thomas H. Dameron:—My statement of cross breeding thoroughbreds and draft brings many criticisms. True, a purebred is to be prized, but the object has much to do with it. What are our thoroughbreds but the result of careful cross breeding on the Arab? The standard bred is the offspring of the same line! The draft horse has his purpose and place.

You say you ride heavily, and, as others, look to a horse able to carry you. True, you may get a mongrel, but again the percentage runs high in the thoroughbred characteristics—head, legs and stamina—on a heavier frame.

I wonder if the Irish thoroughbred hunter does not carry a little draft blood? They are excellent all around saddlehorses for any kind of hard riding.

Few thoroughbreds weigh as much as 1300 lbs. Eden Rambler, a Government remount stud, Irish thoroughbred, weighs 1250 to 1300. Most of the German horses are heavy. Some of Dinter's colts are very heavy. I would advise you to get the mares and then secure a Government stallion. Most breeds of horses have sprung from families, or even individual horses. You can develop such a family or breed, yourself, but you would probably not live to profit by it.

Ski

HOW to begin—on the level and downhill.

Request:—"1. Kindly tell me what size ski I need. I am 5′ 2″ tall.

2. Please tell me how I should begin skiing; proper form to make small jumps, and long slope touring."

—EDWARD FEAGESON, Jamaica, New York

Reply, by Mr. W. H. Price:—1. If you are five feet two inches tall, I would suggest a pair of skis about six feet nine inches. One way to judge the proper length is to stand with your arm stretched at full length above your head; the ski, placed upright, should be at least long enough for its tip to reach the roots of your fingers, and it may well reach a few inches beyond the fingertips.

2. Now for a few words as to how to begin skiing. On the level, hold your skis exactly parallel and as close together as possible (not more than two inches apart) and take a long, easy, lunging step, keeping the knee of the advancing leg well over the foot, and leaning the body well forward. Running downhill, hold the skis close together so that they leave a single track; one ski about a foot in advance of the other; the advanced leg almost straight at the knee, the other more bent—nearly all the weight on the back foot. The inside of the front knee should be pressed against

the knee cap of the other; body erect and arms hanging easily by the sides.

Skiing, like all other sports, requires practise, and if you follow the advice given above, you will soon get on to it.

East Africa

BRITISH dependencies do not welcome the inexperienced settler.

Request:—"I would appreciate it very much if you could give me some information about Uganda, Tanganyika and Kenya. I am at present in the U. S. Army, but my time will be up shortly. I have saved some money and would like to go to Africa and buy a small farm or work for some farmer, or do any kind of work.

I realize that times are bad all over the world, but it might be the best time to start into something. Would you give me some information about immigration travel costs, approximate, or the situation that exists in the above named colonies?"

—JOHN CLARKE, Schofield Barracks, Hawaii

Reply, by Capt. R. W. van Raven de Sturler:—Though I understand a young man's desire to see the world and settle in its most appealing spot—having been young once myself—I must seriously advise you NOT to try your luck and your money in any one of the three British possessions or mandates in East Africa.

It is only 2½ years since I myself returned from my last trip through these very three countries and conditions then simply were not only most discouraging but miserable, commercially speaking, and necessarily must have grown worse since. White labor, even in your own behalf and on your own farm or plantation, is out of the question; neither your dignity as a member of the white, ruling race nor the climate permits you to do so, so that employment, except as overseer on some farm or coffee plantation, is most improbable, and, besides, this position requires considerable African experience, knowledge of conditions and ability to handle and speak to the native labor in their own idiom, to acquire which—there being no universally spoken native language, though Arabic is quite widely understood—considerable time and location in certain districts is required.

NOW as to the purchase of a farm or land: Approximate land values are as follows: Coffee plantations: Sterling 10 to 60 to 80 per acre. Mixed Farming land: Sterling 2 to 10 per acre. Maize land: Sterling 3 to 6 per acre. Wattle land: Sterling 3 to 5 per acre. No Freehold Land since 1912. The British Crown always retains the rights to ALL minerals, mineral oils, precious stones, water, timber, right of way, railroads, etc. The above is just a small part of general information, applicable to practically all three countries mentioned by you; for detailed information I'll have to refer you to H. M's East African Dependencies Office, Royal Mail Buildings, Cockspur Street, London, S. W. 1. Since the rules and regulations pertaining to the acquisition of lands are countless and constantly changeable, you should furnish the London office with all the details at your disposition, such as capital available, experience in farming or other fields, definite purpose, sort of land desired, etc.

To emigrate into the three British dependencies you refer to, you are required to furnish proof of the possession of Sterling 37/10/00. The authorities have wide powers to exclude undesirables (and generally speaking, I would say that in my opinion Americans might consider themselves as such).

Your traveling expenses are quite considerable on account of railroad, autobus and possibly safari travel and can not be dependably estimated until your destination is definitely known. Sea travel to Aden is about $450.00 first class, to which you will have to add hotel expenses while waiting for steamer connections to Dar es Salaam or any other port of entry in Africa, whence railroad, auto or safari travel begins, in accordance with your destination.

Now, some general advice as an American to an American: Americans, contrary to general opinion, are NOT welcomed by the British—they naturally give preference to their own nationals—in matters of settlement, colonization, social life, assistance of any kind, etc. They are a bit snobbish, sometimes difficult to get along with for strangers, particularly Americans, in spite of all protestations to the contrary.

Confederate

INSIGNIA of rank worn by Southern officers.

Request:—"Could you tell me the insignia of an officer's rank in the Confederate Army during the Civil War (from lieutenant to general)?"

—CHARLES F. HYLAND, Los Angeles, California

Reply, by Capt. Glen R. Townsend:—

2nd Lieutenant: One horizontal bar on each side of the front opening of the coat collar.
1st Lieutenant: Two horizontal bars as above.
Captain: Three horizontal bars as above.
Major: One star, worn as above.
Lieutenant-Colonel: Two stars equal in size as above.
Colonel: Three stars as above.
General Officer: Three stars, surrounded by two laurel branches, the center star about twice the size of the others; the whole design worn on the coat collar as above.

In addition to the collar insignia, Confederate officers were designated by a braid loop of intricate

design on each sleeve of the uniform coat. This loop was formed of one row of braid for lieutenants, two rows for captains and majors, three rows for lieutenant-colonels and colonels and four rows for general officers. Other insignia was worn to indicate to which branch of the service an officer belonged.

Automobile

FLUSHING the radiator with washing soda.

Request:—"I would appreciate information on flushing an automobile radiator with washing soda." —C. MCMURRICH, Dundas, Ontario

Reply, by Mr. Edmund B. Neil:—The amount of cleaning a radiator may require depends of course upon how much deposit has accumulated in it, and what the nature of the deposit is.

A mild safe treatment for a clogged radiator consists in the use of washing soda. For the usual size, dissolve about two pounds of this in a gallon of warm water, drain radiator, put this solution in, refill with clean water to full capacity. Now run the engine with solution in the cooling system until it boils or nearly so, covering the radiator with paper to hasten heating. *Washing soda must be hot to be effective.* Much of the failure to obtain a good cleansing action from this chemical is due to trying to obtain action with only tepid or warm water in the cooling system. When it boils, be sure that it does not come in contact with the finish of the hood or body, as it is a very effective paint remover when hot. Run engine at close to boiling temperature for about ten minutes, drain, rinse with two full charges of clean water before putting in final charge for continuous running. This treatment is effective in removing grease (from water pump gland) and certain deposits. It will usually remove quite a little rust and dirt.

Nature's Cycle

FROM a census of ground nesting birds, birds of prey, varying hares and duck-kills, an experienced hunter and trapper hopes to work out a system for the periodic abundance of fur-bearers.

Request:—"Could you kindly tell me where to obtain books on the fur-bearing animals of Canada containing information on their life, habits, food, diseases, and periodical cycles. Also books on the varying hare, and the hawks and owls or any predatory species of birds within the range of the varying hare.

I would very much like to obtain a census of ground nesting birds such as partridges for a long period, over ten years if possible, in an area that has not had much change of game laws or population. And the statistics of the number of ducks killed in any state or province over a period of twenty years. I have made many inquiries but so far I have failed to get replies to the two above questions.

I have been a hunter and trapper here for 19 years, and my observations lead me to believe that the cycles of the above are related and occur in a definite order, and I wish to study the question thoroughly and get the opinions of others."

—FRANK CONIBEAR, Forth Smith, Canada

Reply, by Mr. Davis Quinn:—There are no books that I know of containing extensive information on the diseases and periodic cycles of Canadian fur-bearers. These subjects, of which little is known or understood, have so far been but sparsely touched by scientific writers. The two works of Seton, "Life-histories of Northern Animals" (1909), and "Lives of Game Animals" (1926), would cover the ground you want more thoroughly than any other one work, and references are cited in them that would eventually enable you to track down most of what little is now in print on this all-too-vague subject. A very full account of these fluctuations of fur-bearers through the north country is given by Preble in "North American Fauna No. 27", issued by the U. S. Biological Survey, Washington, D. C. (1908, p.199; out of print.) You will find a good popular condensed account of these cycles in C. Gordon Hewitt's "Conservation of the Wild Life of Canada", p. 218.

THERE are no books on the varying hare. The best I can do here is again to refer you to Seton's "Life-histories" (vol. I, p. 621), and "Lives" (vol. IV, p. 705). The range of this mammal seems to be most of boreal North America except the Arctic zone, and probably practically all predatory birds inhabiting this region attack this rabbit, but its most common feathered enemies seem to be the goshawk, golden eagle, great gray owl, horned owl and snowy owl. You can look up the habits and distribution of these and other predators in Taverner's two volumes, "Birds of Eastern (and Western) Canada", issued by the Geological Survey, Dept. of Mines, Ottawa, Canada.

I do not doubt you have been unable to obtain census figures for nesting partridges over a period of ten years. There are no such complete records in existence. The best consecutive record of fluctuating abundance is Norman Criddle's, appearing in "Canadian Field Naturalist", for Apr., 1930. This is not of nesting birds but the completed crop in the fall. For a grouse record from the United States I suggest you communicate with Gardiner Bump, care of Dr. A. A. Allen, Cornell University, Ithaca, N. Y., or Ralph T. King, Administration Building, University Farm, St. Paul, Minn. Neither of them will have a ten-year record, but they can point out to you the best records that exist.

THERE are no statistics available of duck kills over a period of twenty years. The only State I know of that has such a record, starting I believe from 1919 or perhaps a little earlier, is Minnesota.

Address your inquiry to the State Department of Conservation at St. Paul. Probably the best-posted man in the country on these matters is Mr. Aldo Leopold, Head of the Game Survey, 421 Chemistry Building, Madison, Wis. If there is obtainable information on these subjects he can supply it, or advise where it can be found.

These "kill" censuses are not reliable. Not long ago a record was kept of wild turkeys shot during the open season in Pennsylvania. That year there were reported slain by sportsmen some 5000 of these birds, an incredible figure, there being probably not that many wild turkeys in all of the eastern United States! The same thing happened recently with the golden plover when during an open season on that bird, 5000 were reported killed on Long Island, in a year when golden plover were so scarce that it is doubtful if even 500 visited Long Island during their entire migration. In the first case perhaps some hunters did not have the courage to turn in a blank. In the second they no doubt reported any species of plover bagged as "golden", in order to keep within the law.

WHILE the well known periodic abundance of certain fur-bearers is not yet fully or even partially understood, it is quite likely that the variation in the numbers of ground nesting birds like partridges is related to these phenomena. The chief foods of the cycle affected fur-bearers (lynx, fox [all phases], wolf, marten, fisher, and mink) are the mouse, the vole, and chiefly the varying hare, and the abundance of the fur-bearers seems dependent first of all on the abundance of these food mammals. However, when the hares or the mice grow too numerous, as periodically happens, these two animals suddenly and mysteriously disappear, probably primarily from overcrowding that causes starvation and epidemics, chiefly the latter. Here your ground nesting birds would fit in nicely, particularly as an emergency diet for the birds of prey whose main bill of fare is ordinarily the same as that of the furbearers. Also all the fur-bearers, who are themselves quite as predatory as the birds of prey, would probably concentrate on a diet of ground birds, as opportunity offered.

Some time ago Cabot, in Labrador and Ungava, made some observations on the effect of the varying abundance of mice on the larger animals. The second year of these observations mice were noticeably increased over the first year, as were likewise hawks and ptarmigans, which had grown now fairly numerous. Falcons and owls had increased. A wolverene and a bear killed were full of mice. The mice were so numerous that "low twigs and all small growth were riddled by them. There was a tattered aspect about the moss and ground in many places not quite pleasant to see." In the next year (1906) the mice had vanished with the snow, with a resulting influence on wild life thereabouts that was astounding. Falcons disappeared to a bird, ptarmigan were very scarce, and for the first time the hunting cry of wolves was heard at night, seeking caribou in the absence of the suddenly rare smaller animals.

It has been argued that decrease in food affects the fertility of predatory species; and obversely that an abundance of food may restrain the reproductive powers of these creatures. But we have too few facts about these strange phenomena to theorize.

Small progress has been made in the study of the diseases of the ruffed grouse. Prof. Allen, to whom I refer above, has been investigating this matter at some pains, but I do not believe he could enlighten you any further than the extent of his article, that I list below with others of kindred scope. The evidence at hand indicates that grouse do not contract tularemia, or "rabbit-fever".

Consult:

The Problem of Tularemia in Game Birds, American Game, Aug.-Sept., p. 79. 1928.

Diseases of Ruffed Grouse, American Game, Mar. 1928, p. 29.

X. Ruffed Grouse Investigation, By A. A. Allen, American Game, Apr.-May, 1929, p. 1.

Quail Disease in U. S., Cir. 109, Bureau of Animal Industry, Washington, D. C. 1907.

Food, Nesting, and Disease Studies of Bobwhite, Amer. Game, Jan. 1928, p. 7.

Another book that might help you: "Mammals of the North West Territories", by R. MacFarlane, 1905.

I would be most interested to learn the results of your findings.

India

THE difficulties of getting a job are nowhere more forbidding than in India. An American secretary can not compete with native clerks.

Request:—"I wish to go to India, say Bombay or Calcutta. Do you think it is possible for me to get a job there by placing my application with a large firm by mail? I am a secretary-stenographer, assistant bookkeeper and general office clerk, have had eleven years office experienc, and am able to furnish A-1 references."

—(MISS) WILLIE BEN KING, Houston, Texas

Reply, by Mr. Gordon MacCreagh:—I am sorry to tell you that I must be very discouraging to your aspirations for India.

Try, first, please, to understand the situation in that country.

There exist, of course, many business firms which employ secretary-stenographers. Just the same as they exist in New York City. But consider what would be your chances of obtaining a position in New York by simply writing to some firm stating your qualifications. An application to Bombay or to Calcutta or to any other Indian city would stand no better chance than one to New York.

Furthermore, you must consider the scale of salaries paid in the East for work such as you do.

Remember, the American scale of living is the highest in the world. The farther one travels East, the lower falls that scale. White people contrive to live in the East only when they can do work that natives of those countries can not do. In India there are countless graduates of local colleges, perfectly competent to do secretarial work and willing to do such work for about $20.00 *a month*.

So much for ordinary secretarial work. So that is instantly ruled out of the question.

But let us suppose that your qualifications are unusual. There are a few positions held by white girls; a very few. These are positions of trust and responsibility which certain employers feel ought to be held by white people. They are a matter of individual prejudice and preference. Such appointments are not very well paid. A white girl holding such a job is much to be pitied. Her position is that of an underling. Her salary does not permit her to live on the same scale as the great majority of white people. She must live in cheaper surroundings and must of necessity compete with Eurasian girls (mixed color). A white girl's lot in such surroundings is not to be envied.

Let us assume that your urge to go to India is not to be denied; that you would be willing to sacrifice everything for your desire to go to India. I'm afraid I must tell you that your prospects of getting a job by mail are nil. Today less than ever. Business firms in India are 98% British. Owing to existing conditions, there is an active campaign in all British countries to "support British industries and employ British subjects". You, as an American, would not even be considered.

Only for one slim chance do I not write down your aspirations as utterly hopeless. That slim chance is: *If* you could go out there. *If* you might have sufficient money to live for a half year or so. If you might then impress your personality upon some employer and convince him that your qualifications were superior to those of local competitors. Then you *might* land a job.

Unless you are in a position to do these things, my opinion is that your chances are nil.

Hard Time Token

A PRIVATE penny that was a political cartoon.

Request:—"I would like any information you can supply about the medal I have tried to draw in the enclosure. On the original, the figure inside the chest is plainly Andrew Jackson. I found the medal while looking over an old collection of coins my father made as a boy.

If you can tell me when, by whom, and for what purpose it was made, I will be much obliged."

—CHARLES BRYAN, Cambridge, Massachusetts

Reply, by Mr. Howland Wood:—Your piece, on one side of which is President Jackson coming out of a chest and the other side a jackass, is known as a "hard time token". These were issued by private sources and put into circulation as a cent between the years 1837 and 1844, during times when there was a great deal of hard feeling and political unrest against Jackson and his successor, Van Buren, largely caused by Jackson's attitude against the Bank of the United States. Most of the pieces were satirical and political—there were over a hundred different pieces in the series.

Some are very rare, but yours happens to be one of the commoner ones and dealers sell this according to condition anywhere from ten to twenty-five cents.

Yacht

FOR a crew of twelve, a deepwater packet should be at least seventy-five feet in length.

Request:—"My requirements are somewhat as follows: An auxiliary sailing boat large enough to carry a maximum of twelve men, but small enough to be manned by half that number in a pinch, also with room for provisions, for full complement, for extended offshore, probably trans-Pacific or Atlantic cruises. Naturally I want the last word in sturdy construction and sea-ability, without having to pay the price of some millionaire's plaything.

What I would appreciate from you is advice as to the following: What kind of wood to be used in hull, frame, deck and sticks? What type rigging? What type hull and underwater lines, length, draft, beam, keel, etc.? I want to get a general estimate from shipbuilders and must give them a rough idea of just what I want. However, if you think that it would pay me to look around for a vessel that has already seen some service please do not hesitate to let me know, as I will not have a great deal left over if I have to have a special boat built for me."

—L. LA RUE, Townsend, Washington

Reply, by Mr. A. R. Knauer:—An auxilliary sailing vessel large enough to carry a crew of twelve men on a trip such as you outline means a pretty good sized packet, while one for six could be wrapped up in 50 feet very nicely, in fact, a friend of mine has recently completed a cruise from Manila to New York in a 47-foot by 13-foot cutter with a ship's company of six all told. For living accommodations for six men in addition to these 75-foot would probably have been necessary. Don't forget that the globe has been circled under sail by several individuals alone, so I would suggest for many reasons the fewer the better.

Mahogany, cypress, pine of various kinds are the most commonly used planking; oak frames, white pine decks, fir and spruce for spars. Steel rigging is almost universal, with deadeyes or turn buckles. The hull should be full bodied, plenty of

sheer and short overhangs. Beam around 25 per cent of length, draft probably around one-half of the beam.

I most certainly think that it would be considerably cheaper to purchase a boat already built than to build one. It might be a yacht now used for pleasure, or a commercial boat, probably a fisherman, as the majority of the modern cruising yachts of today are distinctly of the fisherman type, such as were developed in the Banks fishing industry, which necessitated speed and seaworthiness.

Rifle

ACCURACY of high velocity arms.

Request:—"When an Army rifle is firmly clamped in a vise and fired a number of times, will the bullet always strike in the same spot at, say, 500 feet? Will the bullet rise after leaving the barrel of the rifle, or fall? Also, if either, will you please explain why?"

—MELVIN N. BACON, Dawson, Minnesota

Reply, by Mr. Donegan Wiggins:—If an accurate Army rifle, say our own service Springfield, were screwed in a vise, I would not expect a table-top to catch the bullets at two hundred yards, due to the uneven vibrations set up by the discharge of the arm.

But with a machine rest, such as the Government arsenal, the great arms factories, and the cartridge and powder makers, as well as certain private experimenters, use, consisting of a concrete base and metal forms to hold the rifle in such a way that its vibrations are controlled, a good rifle will shoot very closely.

I have never yet known of a rifle that would put five consecutive bullets into the same hole at 500 feet, although some have made groups that seem to have cut the bullet holes into each other at long ranges; Sawyer illustrates one group of eleven shots at 200 yards, nine of which make one very large irregular hole. But these were special target rifles of great length and weight, with special target sights, and fired from rests.

The bullet of a rifle when fired may rise above the line of sight, and generally does when shooting at other than extremely close ranges. But it never rises above the line of departure, which is the true line of the bore of the arm, unless deflected by wind, some object struck in flight, etc. The bullet tends to fall at the rate of 16⅔ feet per second, like any other falling body, after it leaves the muzzle of the rifle; hence, it is sighted to place the bullets a bit higher on the target, to compensate for this fall. The modern rifles with their high velocity bullets put the bullet a greater distance from the rifle before the fall becomes great enough to miss an object, and hence differ from the older type of low power arms.

The fall of the bullet is caused by the force of gravity, of course, and the air's action in retarding it and slowing it down the farther it goes from the rifle.

Our Experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

1. **Service**—It is free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelope and *full* postage, *not attached,* are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.

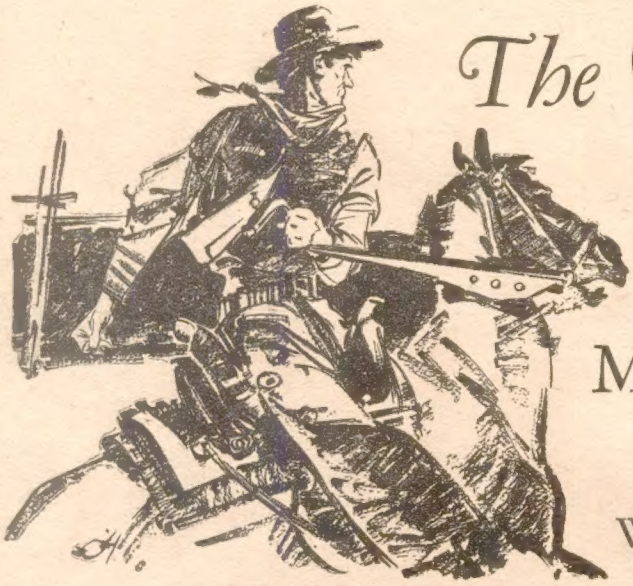
2. **Where to Send**—Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. **DO NOT** send questions to this magazine.

3. **Extent of Service**—No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.

4. **Be Definite**—Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.

A complete list of the "Ask Adventure" experts appears in the issue of the fifteenth of each month

THE TRAIL AHEAD—THE NEXT ISSUE OF *ADVENTURE*, MARCH 15th



The CROSS-*in-a-* BOX MYSTERY

By

W. C. TUTTLE

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